

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Wild

MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF WILDERNESS ADVENTURE HERITAGE

ISSUE

140

HAPPY TRAVELS IN BHUTAN
COOLOOLA GREAT WALK
LERDERBERG TRACK NOTES
WILDERNESS SURVIVAL MYTHS
THE GREEN DINOSAUR
GETTING FIT FOR TREKKING
PORTRAIT: KLAUS HUENEKE
FOOD DROP TIPS

Call of the desert

Profile: Chris Turney
Rockclimbing at 86
Fight for the reef
Peru's endangered rivers
Expedition medicine
Solar chargers

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Wild

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WARNING

The activities covered
in this magazine are
dangerous. Undertaking
them without proper training,
experience, skill, regard to
safety and equipment could
result in serious injury or death.



*Cover Trekking with
camels in the Simpson
Desert. Danielle
Curnow-Andreasen*

*Contents Orange fairy
basslets on the Great
Barrier Reef, QLD.
Gary Bell*

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From the sands to the screen and back

Though I'd rather be in the fresh air than a dingy cinema any day or night, I've often been described as a film geek. As a teenager I was the precocious media student forcing my friends to be part of moody *Wuthering Heights*-style short films in which the Essex saltmarshes stood for the Yorkshire Moors and the school's expensive microphone always ended up in the mud. Now I content myself with the odd GoPro endeavour (other action cameras are available), though my big trip to the Tetons over Christmas only yielded 10 minutes of shaky footage of my partner cursing some broken snowshoes and me laughing so hard I burst my ancient down jacket and exploded feathers everywhere. I realise I should probably leave the adventure films to the experts.

As you might guess from our cover (and the story on p42), I'm particularly excited about the upcoming release of *Tracks*, the \$12 million film adaption of Robyn Davidson's classic book. In recounting a truly epic desert adventure, I'm expecting this beautifully shot film—much like Terry Krieg's new book (p73)—to inspire a new generation to swap skyscrapers for sand dunes. I'm also looking forward to watching some of the craziest and most thought-provoking docs from backcountry when the mountain film festivals kick off next month (see p12). Just this week I downloaded *If a Tree Falls*, after seeing it on the Adelaide Festival Docweek schedule. If you've not yet seen the 2011 film about the Oregon arm of the Earth Liberation Front I urge you to check it out. Its exploration of the line between environmental activism and eco-terrorism may seem a world away from the recent protests here against coal mining, reef dumping, shark culling... (I won't go on), but it does make you realise how much some people are willing to put themselves through to stand up for the natural world.

Back to doing rather than watching, I trust you're tuned into what activities are on offer in your home state as part of the annual celebration that is Parks Week (March 3-8), and hope you'll get fired up reading the fitness tips in our beginner's guide feature (p60). Before you start complaining about aching muscles, I suggest you read about what Enn Truopold has been up to (p54), or how Noeleen Proud felt after her trek in Bhutan (p37).

Most importantly, I hope you'll let your kids, and grandkids, and other people's kids know that we are now accepting entries for this year's **Wild Writers** competition for students. Our theme this time round is simply 'life in the bush' and a series of marvellous prizes will again be awarded to the top three entrants in each age category (details on p8).

If you fancy yourself something of an expert at living in the bush I'd be keen to know whether you agree with Kevin Casey's assessment of survival myths (p56), or if you've any bushwalking tips worthy of our Platypus pack giveaway in *Wildfire*.

I'd also like to thank all the readers who sent in photographs and anecdotes from adventures over the Christmas break and wish we had room to publish them all in one go. I'm grateful too to those who pointed out that we printed a global statistic in place of national figures in 'Couple to trek Canning Stock Route' (p12, *Wild* issue 139). According to Suicide Prevention Australia, there is an average of six deaths by suicide in Australia each day. I know you join me in wishing the Webers all the best for their foot-powered quest to address this.

Carlie Trotter
Editor

Carlie

Wild

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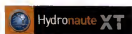
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Issue 139, Jan-Feb 2014



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LETTER OF THE ISSUE

Stefan wins a Platypus Sprinter XT 35 hydration backpack valued at \$225. This top-loading weatherproof pack is designed for long day hikes with a three-liter reservoir, waistbelt

THANKS TO EXPERT RETAILERS

I am writing after an experience that felt like a circle of life had run its course. Twenty years ago I was a nervous 13-year-old and new customer at the premier outdoor store in Ballarat, fed-up with the heavy equipment loaned by my school for trips. The staff at the Snowgum store, which seemed to me a treasure trove, could see I was new to the outdoors and were amazingly helpful, relaxed and never pushy. They were happy to let me try a range of products, give me honest opinions and let me take literature home (even a few Wild magazines). I quickly went from hating camping to loving it. Gradually I built up my gear collection, starting with a Fairydawn Kepler 60-litre pack, a Fairydawn Duo tent, Fairydawn Bushwalker sleeping bag, One Planet waterproofs, Trangia and Thermo-A-Rest. I developed a friendship with the store manager David Martin and got to know him better as I got older. Fastforward to now and I'm still using almost all the equipment David suggested to me on that first visit, which is a testament to his knowledge and experience. David has been an inspiration to me, and a support through some of the most horrific and fantastic times in my life. I recently asked him what to do after someone fell on my tent and snapped one of the poles. Within three hours he had not only repaired the broken section but shown me how to do this myself and provided me with a spare original Easton pole and shock cord—a full 20 years after I purchased the tent. I would like to thank David, who has now left the industry, from

the bottom of my heart for opening my eyes to everything the great outdoors has to offer. He has been one of the most influential people in my life.

Stefan Lepicier
via email

ON THE RAILS

I write to correct an error in the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary track notes (Wild issue 139, p.64-67). The Ghan travels on the Central Australian line well to the west of the Stuart Highway, joining the Trans Australian line (which takes the Indian Pacific to Perth) at Tarkoola. The line mentioned in this article alongside the Hawker-Leigh Creek road is in fact a dedicated line carrying coal from the mine in Leigh Creek to the power station in Port Augusta. Historically interesting, however, is that this was the route of the original Ghan on its old 3' 6" gauge line built between 1878 and 1884 (and further extensions reaching Alice Springs in 1929). As an aside, I have treasured childhood memories of four trips on the original Ghan between 1951 and 1955, all but the last of these hauled by a steam locomotive and taking three days. The section south of Marree was replaced by a standard gauge line in 1957, and this whole route was closed in 1980. Most of the original narrow gauge line has now been torn out, but evidence of its former existence can still be seen as you travel this road, in the form of monuments and notices at or near old stations and sidings, as well as old embankments and cuttings. Looking out for these as you drive this 'very flat and straight highway' will be more profitable than watching in vain for the Ghan to sweep by.

Bill Ellemor,
Blackburn, VIC

BLOWN AWAY IN THE ARTHURS

I recently returned from a post-Christmas trip to Tasmania to find the latest issue in the mail. As a magazine about wild places, I agree that you just can't keep politics out of it without putting your (or our) heads in the sand, but recommend visiting the Arthurs between Lake Cygnus and Square Lake as a tonic. I was blown away by the geography and struggled to imagine what it must have been like to walk there before there was a track or anyone even knew a way. With seemingly endless wind and clouds around I also paid more attention than usual to what was underfoot, and was amazed by the variety and beauty of the small alpine flowers.

Andrew Naumann
via email

Reader's letters & tips are welcome and could win you a fabulous piece of outdoor kit! Write to Wild, 11-15 Buckhurst St, South Melbourne, VIC 3025 or email wild@primecreative.com.au

FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

John Perkins: A 30-year-old J&H (One Planet) sleeping bag, top quality, nothing like hanging on to good gear! #OldestOutdoorKit

Kavita Bowry: Scarpa walking boots, 1987 and counting.... #OldestOutdoorKit

Maree Quinn: I bought a Macpac canvas backpack in 1978. It has hiked round the world. Currently it's on South Island hiking with my dad. It's bashed and battered but still going strong #OldestOutdoorKit

Kathy Anderson: One day I'll write an article about taking students on weekend bushwalks. One 14-year-old asked me "Where's the electricity?" while holding her hairdryer at a beautiful bush campsite. Another packed his portable TV.

@chayward94: The Murray River has a lot of beautiful hidden beaches, some even nicer than ocean beaches!

@Rogaining: Rogaining calendar has been updated with events such as the Australasian Champs in October

BUSHWALKING TIP



The plastic webbing that holds together bags of oranges and onions makes a great hygienic alternative to scourers or sponges, which can fill with food residue after washing your pots. Just cut a section out and scrunch it up. It's strong enough to remove burnt porridge but gentle enough not to damage non-stick coatings. Afterwards, just rinse and give it a flick and all food scraps are gone.

Chris Russell,
Ashburton, VIC

Chris wins a Platypus Tokal XC3 hydration backpack valued at \$110. This low-profile pack features a two-litre reservoir, a litre of gear storage, ventilated shoulder straps and reflective detailing.





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ENTER Wild Writers 2014



The inaugural *Wild Writers* competition, run in association with Outdoor Education Australia and Sea to Summit, attracted more than 150 entries from students across Australia between Grade 5 and Year 12. In addition to prizes for the three finalists in each of the four age categories, the winning stories were published in the July/August '13 issue of the magazine and on wild.cam.au. For 2014, we are again seeking to encourage young people to develop their writing skills while appreciating the outdoors. Entries for this year's *Wild Writers* competition opened on February 1 and will close on June 1, 2014.

This year's topic is *Life in the bush*

There are four age groups: Grades 5/6, Years 7/8, Years 9/10, Years 11/12

Entries must be in English, 500-750 words and in written form (eg. essay, non-fictional narrative, diary entries, poem). They must be the student's own work, original and unpublished. Writers are encouraged to write about their experiences and feelings, the flora and fauna they come across and the lessons they learn out in the bush. Images are not required for entry but may be requested from finalists. Educators are encouraged to submit entries on behalf of their class or school, though entrants may also submit material independently. Students may enter as many times as they wish.

To enter by email: Entries must be emailed to wild@primecreative.com.au in .doc, .docx or .rtf form together with a signed and scanned permission form (available at wild.com.au/schools). Multiple entries may be sent in one email.

To enter by post: Send hard copies (these will not be returned) with a signed permission form to: Wild Writers
11-15 Buckhurst St
South Melbourne, VIC 3205

wild.com.au/schools

Life on the edge



Photographer Jason Lorch writes: This was taken on a Canon PowerShot S95 during a fantastic three-day trip exploring the Wild Dogs and Kowmung River area with the Sydney Bushwalkers. We experienced long days, big climbs and tricky passes but at the end of each day were rewarded with beautiful camping spots.

Photograph checklist: Self-portraits

- We all love to take a 'selfie' while out and about in the impressive Australian countryside, but it's important to remember that the image should also show off your surroundings.
- Place your camera, or smartphone, at different heights. Shots taken from close to the ground or high above your head will create some great angles and perspectives.
- Composition is the key. Be aware of your surroundings and identify a landmark or important feature of the background to incorporate. This will ensure your notes see where you have ventured.
- A remote control is handy but you can also get quality shots by setting the timer on your camera. Choosing the right tripod is the bigger question.

Award-winning landscape photographer Cameron Blake runs weekend workshops and 6-day photographic tours on the Overland Track. overlandphototours.com.au



Jason wins a LowePro Dryzone 40L roll-top backpack valued at \$269. The durable pack with breathable EVA backpad boasts an IPX-6 splashproof rating, removable padded camera case and lash points for attaching your trekking poles or tripod.

For your chance to win a quality piece of outdoor kit, send your humorous, inspiring or spectacular shots to wild@primecreative.com.au.

To be considered for the May/June *Wild Shot*, submit your best photo by April 1.

CLICK TO P40
for frog photography

All-female team to attempt K2

The first all-female Australasian team to attempt an ascent of K2, the world's second highest mountain, will set out for Pakistan this June under the leadership of Sydney-based mountaineer Chris Burke.

The 8,611-metre peak has historically been viewed as cursed for women, with four of the 12 female summiters having died on descent and others in separate mountaineering accidents.

Burke, who holds dual Australia/New Zealand nationality, expects the team to include one other Australian and two Kiwis but members were not confirmed at the time of writing. She said: "We're focused on getting more women involved in outdoor activities. It's empowering for women to see that they can abseil or rock climb, and when you feel physically strong that leads to other things. "More activities are available for girls now than when I was at school but there's a lot more to do, plus it's hard to get the attention of the mainstream media," she added.

Last year, Burke gave up her job as a layer and summited four peaks over 8,000 metres. She was in Pakistan when Islamic militants killed 11 men at Nanga Parbat base camp in the north of the country, and on Manaslu in Nepal the previous year when an avalanche buried climbers at the camp above. She told Wild: "I take every mountain



seriously and plan well to minimise risk, but risk remains nevertheless. K2 is in the border region so it's highly secure but you can't go to Pakistan without first considering safety on and off the mountain."

The team will be supported by Kathmandu-based logistics firm Himalayan Ascent. The 45-year-old mountaineer added: "Before Everest [she summited in 2011] I spent a lot of time working on my mental toughness. It takes a lot to turn around and can be the

thing that people aren't prepared for. I promised myself I would make good decisions."

K2 is often considered more technical than Everest because of its erratic weather, steep ice climbs and high risk of rock fall. The team plans to begin the expedition with an acclimatisation ascent of 8,047-metre Broad Peak.

"I trekked from a young age but came to mountaineering relatively late. I was looking for a sport I could carry into old age, and women reach their peak for high altitude climbing in their 40s," said Burke.

"Every expedition I've been on I've learnt something about myself and others, even if it's not gone the way I wanted. I like seeing what my body and mind can achieve."

To train, she spends a lot of time climbing and bushwalking in the Blue Mountains, and can so often be seen on the Great North Walk that friends have renamed it the 'Burke Highway'.

Her favourite peak to date is Ama Dablam, for its "incredible beauty and full-bodied climbing".

Greg Child and Greg Mortimer became the first Australians to summit K2 in 1990.

Last July, Canberra Chris Warner turned back from Camp 2 the day before an avalanche claimed the lives of New Zealand mountaineers Marty and Denali Schmidt.

Bushwalker awarded OAM

Reid doing what he loves most



David Reid, former president of Bushwalking Australia, has been awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia.

After taking up the activity in his early 20s, Reid is credited with professionalising peak bodies for bushwalkers, including what is now Bushwalking Victoria.

The 77-year-old said: "I found out in the beginning of December but it's still sinking

in, it's a great honour that someone has seen fit to nominate me.

"It was only when I joined a club that I realised how important it was to have a peak body for bushwalkers, and that we needed to broaden our mission to represent the needs of all recreational walkers."

A background in market development helped Reid restructure the Victorian state body in 2004 based around an elected board and focused on building relationships with government agencies. He then turned his attention to the national umbrella organisation. "When I became involved with Bushwalking Australia it was not a very cohesive organisation because you had some state bodies that had been founded in the 1930s based on the threats to natural areas and others much more recently; now there is more of a two-way dialogue," he told Wild.

"Some of the threats to bushwalking will never change," he added, "but I think clubs today recognise the need to engage and demonstrate their value to the local community."

Reid has also been a longtime supporter

of Bush Search and Rescue Victoria. While he recognises damage can be done to the reputation of bushwalkers by ill-prepared individuals outside of the club system, he believes this makes it all the more important to try and engage non-members. Aside from long-distance walks in Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the UK, Reid continues to enjoy regular outings with the Waverley Bushwalking Club.

His passion for wilderness adventure has only grown with age, though he worries too many landowners are developing multi-use trails without thinking about what different user groups actually want or having plans for track maintenance in place. He said: "The bottom line is I'm passionate about bushwalking and encouraging young people to get into the bush and experience the wonder of it."

"Apart from keeping you fit, it's a lifetime activity that brings a lot of enjoyment and challenges."

Former Bush Heritage chief Doug Humann and Tasmanian parks official Chris Arthur were among the other wilderness advocates to make the Australia Day Honours List.

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Paddling to save the Upper Amazon

Webb on the Upper Palguin in Pulcon, Chile



A 25-year-old paddler from Melbourne is campaigning to save Peru's Marañon River, also referred to as the Upper Amazon, from destruction by government-authorised damming projects.

Ben Webb, who took up kayaking when he joined the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club, plans to lead a group of youngsters from the capital city of Lima on a 30-day trip along the river later this year in an effort to raise environmental awareness in the country's capital.

He told Wild: "After a year working as an environmental engineer I found myself looking for ways I could make more of a difference and incorporate more adventure

into my life, and the idea of this endangered journey really grabbed me."

Around 20 dams are proposed along the Amazon headwaters, the largest of which will submerge 21 riverside communities as well as destroy aquatic habitat and alter silt deposition lower down.

In just two months Webb raised half of his \$10k target for the project, which will culminate in a documentary film edited for both English and Spanish-speaking audiences.

He is currently in Patagonian Chile training for a solo expedition that will help him gain a local perspective on developments throughout the Andes.

The two-month journey will involve mountain biking over the Andes from near Lima, hiking to one of the Amazon River's uppermost sources and then paddling class-five rapids for an elevation drop of around 2,000 metres before reaching a remote Grand Canyon-like stretch of the threatened Marañon River.

"It's the first time I've been to South America so I'm really throwing myself in at the deep end," he said, "but my friends and family are all very supportive and excited for me." He added: "I do not have the capacity, connections or the cultural perspective to [save the river], but maybe I can help those that can save it, find themselves."

Webb became obsessed with the Marañon after learning about the Sierra Rios not-for-profit (sierrarios.org) run by American kayaker James 'Rocky' Contos, who recently started guiding descents of the Amazon headwaters. He hopes to team up with local guides for the group part of the project. "The class-four rapids are fairly straightforward, but my challenge will be coordinating the group and opening up channels of communication in a positive way between the developers and communities affected," said Webb. Previous protests against the developments, some of which are due to begin construction this year, have been sabotaged by violent action.



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Mountain films make it Down Under



Skiers paraglide to remote huts in Poor Mans Heli



Scene from The Last Great Climb. Alistair Leo

The 38th annual Banff Mountain Film Festival returns to Australia in April with a two and half-hour line-up of award-winning short films about life and adventure in some of the world's most isolated locations.

This tour will take in 18 Australian towns, starting in Brisbane on April 8 and finishing at Mount Buller on June 28.

The State Centre Theatre of Western Australia in Perth and the Seymour Centre in Sydney will each host six screenings.

Highlights of this year's program include North of the Sun, about two young Norwegians living on a remote Arctic island, The Last Great Climb filmed on Antarctica's Ulvetanna Peak, and Keeper of the Mountains about the curator of the Himalayan Database.

Other films explore the impact of forest fires on ski areas, the history of mountain biking in Austria and the motivation of daredevil wingsuit pilot Espen Fadnes.

The Australian tour is a spin-off of the festival

founded in 1976 in the Canadian mountain town of Banff, which sees more than 300 mountain culture films from around the world reviewed over one week in November. The Idaho-based Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival also returns to our shores in April, with a pre-winter screening due to be held in Melbourne before a series of shows in the Alps.

Now in its fourth year in Australia, the festival raises funds for the Friends of the Earth climate campaign.

Among the films celebrating human-powered winter experience is a documentary about an expedition tracking wolverines in northern Mongolia and a short about a five-month ski traverse across British Columbia.

Both festivals will feature Valhalla, a fictional film largely set in Alaska that is famous for its scenes of nude skiing.



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Dr Andrew Peacock

Australian medical director of training provider Expedition & Wilderness Medicine



What's the first thing you learn when you come to remote area medicine?

To adapt, make do with less, think on your feet and to never presume that

people in an outdoor environment actually know anything about looking after themselves in such an environment. I'm a climber, paddler and photographer and like nothing more than combining these pursuits with my vocation as a doctor.

After hosting training courses in the UK, Africa and New Zealand, your inaugural Australian course takes place this month – what will it involve?

There's a lot of interest in wilderness medicine in Australia, though it's a niche area. We hope to host two four-day courses a year in the beautiful but unforgiving environment that is the Blue Mountains. We'll cover things like safety on steep ground, rope skills, improvised carrying techniques and the use of group shelters, finishing with a search and rescue simulation.

Is being an expedition medic all glamour and adventure?

No, it can be a thankless task because we're only useful when things go wrong, and nobody wants that to happen. That's why it's good to have another skill to add to the mix. You tend to become part-counsellor, podiatrist, assistant expedition leader, dentist and even veterinarian. I had to treat a horse that had been gored by a yak in Nepal once.

Do you think Australian outdoorspeople are knowledgeable enough about first aid?

In general, I think people have a good grasp

of wilderness medical issues, but they often don't have the experience to know that when something's going wrong it demands a major change in plan. On the other hand, people don't always attempt self-rescue when they could. I've been with climbers when they called for a helicopter evacuation for bruised ribs from rock fall, which I wouldn't have done but it was their choice.

What injuries, and what mistakes, do you see most often in the bush?

Heat-related illness and sun exposure is the number one problem but minor injury to feet and ankles is of course very common too. Your choice of kit becomes critical on longer adventures like walking the Bibbulmun Track; if you're carrying too much weight you'll start to have problems a few days in for example.

What is your advice when doing activities such as bushwalking in intense heat?

The key is to have easily accessible water, in a pack equipped with a hydration bladder for instance, because it allows you to drink more frequently without interrupting your activity. Sip often even when you're not overtly thirsty and plan where you will access more water. I've been caught short twice when paddling the Australian coast, once on the islands in the Bass Strait when a drought completely changed the water source options. I like to mix Gatorade powder with water as a source of calories and electrolytes, but there is no magic mix or essential requirement if you are otherwise able to eat a range of foods during the day to provide salt and calories.

How about things like camping and torn muscles?

Overuse injuries occur when people

undertake long bouts of activity for which they didn't gradually build up to; that's a recipe for disaster. Training is essential to keep tendinitis and sore muscles at bay. Having some simple over-the-counter Ibuprofen handy can be useful but factoring rest days and recovery time into long expeditions is sensible.

What did your routine as ship doctor on the recent Australasian Antarctic Expedition involve?

I was available 24/7 in my cabin next to the small medical clinic. Sea-sickness strikes early in a crossing of the Southern Ocean for those so predisposed so I was busy providing tablets for that, which don't always work well. Once on the ice edge in calm conditions my routine was similar to that of the other passengers, with opportunities to learn from the scientists and photograph the inquisitive penguins on trips ashore.

What's the most memorable environment you've worked in?

A 400-foot superyacht on a transit of the Northwest Passage in the Arctic, and the jungle along the Kokoda Track stand out, but I most enjoy working in the Nepalese Himalaya (pictured). The cold, dry and high environment of the Khumbu region creates numerous challenges each day and it's very rewarding to give people the knowledge and confidence to achieve their goals.

How do you spend your downtime?

I live on the Sunshine Coast so I do a lot of ocean paddling and get out climbing on Frog Buttress in Moogerah Peaks National Park whenever I can.



expeditionmedicine.com.au



Rogaining champs set for Snowy Mountains

The ACT Rogaining Championships will return to the high country of northern Kosciuszko National Park over the weekend of April 12-13. The area near Yarrangobilly Caves had been recently burnt when it played host to the national championships in 2010, but is now in good condition—a mixture of open grassy plains, snowgum woodland and alpine forest with few areas of thick undergrowth. Competitors will pass by historic huts while taking in views of the Brindabellas and Bogong peaks. Organisers are expecting to attract rogainers from New South Wales and Victoria to the eight and 24-hour events owing to easy access via the Snowy Mountains Highway. Novice and experienced rogainers alike are invited to tackle the 1,250-metre to 1,600-metre course, and former world champions David Baldwin and Julie Quinn will be on hand to offer advice.



act.rogaine.asn.au



Julie Quinn scouting the course

Magnetic Island



Godzone, NZ, March 7-15

Forty teams made up of mostly Aussie and Kiwi adventure racers will battle each other and the terrain in this annual seven-day, 500-kilometre expedition on New Zealand's South Island. godzoneadventure.com

Six Foot Track Marathon, NSW, March 8

Around 850 entrants run or walk the length of the 45-kilometre trail between the Explorer's Marked Tree and Jendian Caves each year, with some of the money raised going to the Rural Fire Service. sixfoot.com

Razorback Run, VIC, March 15

The flagship course in this five-distance, self-supported event is a punishing 64 kilometres including three major climbs, starting at Harriestville and covering the full length of the iconic ridge between Feathertop and Hotham. runningwild.net.au

Adventurethor Magnetic Island, QLD, March 29-30

Multisport fans from around the world venture to Far North Queensland

for this notoriously humid and windy event combining trail running, open-water paddling and mountain biking. adventurethor.com.au

Rogue Adventureregine, QLD, April 28

This 24-hour event will see teams of two pick their own route around Lake Perseverance on foot, kayak, mountain bike and stand-up paddleboard, while collecting as many checkpoints as possible and fitting in a bit of archery. rogueadventure.com

Lake Eildon Challenge, VIC, April 5

Combining a 98-kilometre cycle from Mansfield to Eildon, a 25-kilometre paddle to Bonnie Doon and 21-kilometre run, this new outdoor challenge is open to both solo racers and teams. lakeeildonchallenge.com

WildEndurance 100, NSW, May 3-4

Now in its seventh year, the Wilderness Society fundraiser sees 150 teams racing either a 50 or 100-kilometre course through the Megalong and Jamison valleys. wildendurance.org.au

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Age no barrier on AAWT

In late January, five members of the Strzelecki Bushwalking Club completed the 660-kilometre journey from Canberra to Walhalla. The Gippsland and Melbourne-based walkers spent 54 days on the Australian Alps Walking Track, enduring everything from snowstorms to bushfires. Group member Alan Eagle said: "It was a challenge, but we wanted to make it a holiday at the same time. Age is not a problem—our group was between 45 and 65—you just need to be fit and keen." The club's upcoming walks include an Easter trip to Mount Bogong and a visit to the Blue Mountains in May, with the Larapinta Trail tipped as the next long-distance challenge.



shwc.org.au

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

On Mount Speculation in the Viking Wilderness; The group coping with snow drifts in Muellers Pass, Snowy Mountains; Trip leader Cathy Almond crossing the Black River in Victoria.



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Deepest cave discovered

A breakthrough was achieved from Nettlebed Cave into Stormy Pot in late January, confirming the system as New Zealand's deepest cave at 1,197 metres and a through-trip of 38 kilometres, writes Stephen Bunton. The discovery is the culmination of 60 years of exploration work by the New Zealand Speleological Society, as well as many Australians, on mostly annual expeditions in the Mount Arthur area near Nelson. For cavers Kieran McKay (profiled in Wild issue 138), Aaron Gillespie, Neil Silverwood, Troy Watson and Chris Whitehouse, the breakthrough was the climax of four expeditions involving multiple days camping underground. The 1,026-metre-deep Ellis Basin system was previously thought the deepest in the country, while Papua New Guinea's Muruk Cave remains the deepest in the southern hemisphere at 1,258 metres.

The further flung the better

Australian travelers are increasingly interested in visiting destinations once considered too remote or dangerous, according to members of Peak Adventure Travel Group. Intrepid Travel has launched three new Columbia itineraries based on

a surge in sales in 2013, while Peregrine Adventures has added two extra departures for its new Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia tour to cope with demand. Ethiopia, Iran and Algeria are also proving popular this year.

New Kakadu tour

World Expeditions has launched a six-day Kakadu Walking Adventure itinerary incorporating day walks of up to 15 kilometres and iconic experiences such as a cruise through Yellow Water Billabong. The adventure travel firm has invested in two new semi-permanent camps within the national park featuring solar-heated showers and flushing toilets. Trips depart Darwin weekly between May and September.

Loss of a climbing legend

Australian rockclimbing pioneer John Ewbank passed away in December in New York. Through the 1960s and 70s Ewbank established many of the classic lines in the Blue Mountains, including The Janiceps (21) on Mount Piddington, and was first to climb Tasmania's Totem Pole. He championed clean climbing where natural protection could be found and invented

the open-ended, numeric-only grading system in use across Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

New Aussie record in Antarctica

Gold Coast veterinarian Geoff Wilson became the first Australian and fastest person to cross Antarctica coast-to-coast solo in January, raising more than \$200,000 for breast cancer charity the McGrath Foundation in the process. Wilson dragged his pink 'boob-sled' for three and a half months across around 3,400 kilometres in sub-zero temperatures, becoming only the third adventurer to make the crossing unassisted.



One of the stops on World Expeditions' new walking tour



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It's early bird gets the worm. Scott Bennett takes advantage of early season ice in Rocky Mountain National Park with a quick ascent of Neophila (W4-5, M5-6 R). ALTON RICHARDSON



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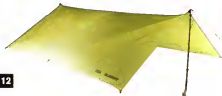
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1 Bear Grylls Survival Bracelet \$25

This manly bracelet containing over 3.5m of paracord is ideal for hanging up or repairing gear. au.gerbergear.com

2 Rainbird Stowaway Jacket \$69.99

A tartan version of the popular pocket-stashable jacket with 5000mm waterproof rating and drawcord hem hits stores in April. rainbirdclothing.com

3 Polar Loop \$139

Pair this 34g waterproof wristband with a heart rate sensor to keep an eye on your ticker and how many steps you've taken, storing your data in the companion smartphone app. polaraustralia.com.au

4 Ranger II GTX \$349.95

Scarpa has updated its leather Ranger boot with ActivFit technology, meaning a more cushiony and grippy last, sole and footbed in both male and female-specific models. outdooragencies.com.au

5 Core Precision Singlet \$99

Compression gear fans will love this seamless and supportive undershirt designed to control your posture as well as your temperature. equimen.com

6 Cold Mountain Lite 900 \$79.90

Darche has added lighter 0°C-rated sleeping bags to its range in 900, 1100 and 1400mm widths and featuring a 500gsm fill, 70D outer and hood drawcord. darche.com.au

7 Tentsile Stingray \$899

Designed as a portable treehouse, this hammock-style tent allows three adults to ditch damp ground with the support of 2,500kg-rated webbing straps. treetents.com.au

8 Bootlegger Modular Pack System \$349.95

The new Super-Tramp suspension system from Boreas allows you to switch from frameless bag to 28L daypack to 30L submersible dry sack with ease. boreas.com

9 Regular NeoAir Venture WV \$139.95

Therm-a-Rest's latest affordable offering features WaveCore technology, which doubles warmth without adding weight or bulk. spelean.com.au

10 Gypsy Snowboard \$599.99

Inspired to shred by the winter Olympics? Try Salomon's good-looking women's board with hybrid 'rock out camber' for stability between your feet and pop at the ends. salomon.com/au

11 Wool Fleece Hoody \$245

This grunge-style pure wool jumper, popular among Tasmanian paddlers, has been updated with a drawstring at the hem for 2014 to maximise cosiness. smittenmemo.com

12 Medium Escapist Tarp \$219

This waterproof 15D nylon tarp designed for minimalist adventures (and available from April) provides 2m x 2.6m of protection for 270g, with pre-attached guy lines that can be tensioned from underneath. seatosummit.com.au



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13 Hubba Hubba NX \$699

MSR has given its bestselling two-man tent an impressive revamp, shaving 255g off the weight, improving ventilation and tweaking vestibule zips to better keep out the rain. spelean.com.au

14 Ground Chair \$97

This 554g foldable chair is around 300g lighter than its predecessor but can seat someone up to 120kg. helinox.com.au

15 Lost Ranger \$319

US brand Big Agnes arrives in Australia with this rectangular sleeping bag featuring water repellent 650-fill down, external mat sleeve, no-draft collar and high-tech vertical baffles to eliminate cold spots. wildearth.com.au

16 H7R2 Headlamp \$149.95

LED Lenser's popular rechargeable headlamp has been overhauled for wider illumination and extra durability, and now features a battery indicator and wheel switch for adjusting brightness. ledlenser.com.au

17 APXS Peruvian Goggle \$209.95

The first fully frameless goggles for alpine adventures boast an anti-glare interchangeable lens complete with NASA's anti-fog technology and silicone-beaded strap. dragonalliance.com

18 Gorillapod Action Tripod \$49.95

An update of the Gorillapod, this flexible 191g tripod features an integrated ballhead with spirit level to help you fine-tune your composition and comes with a GoPro mount. joby.com

19 PreCip Jacket \$149.95

Marmot's new microporous NanoPro fabric has been used to update the seam-taped PreCip shell jacket, making it around 40 per cent more breathable without sacrificing wind- or waterproofness. marmotaustralia.com.au

20 Armour Bra \$69.99

With a super-soft back clasp, anti-chafe edges, mesh panels and Under Armour's famous sweat-fighting fabric, this is the bees knees of underwear without underwire. underarmour.com

21 Roadster Watch \$225

If you like your watches Swiss-made and water-resistant to 100 metres, consider this stainless steel number with silicone band and luminous hands and numerals. wenger.com.au

22 Tikka Headlamp \$49.95

Petzl's upgraded Tikka headlamp provides up to 80 lumens and a range of 40 metres, with two lighting modes, a wide beam and washable headband. spelean.com.au

23 Cerro Torre ND 60-80

Lowe Alpine has updated its classic trekking pack for women with the new easy-to-adjust Aviom back system designed to carry heavy loads in the most stable and comfortable way. intertrek.com.au

24 LuminAID \$39.98

Sales of this solar-powered inflatable lantern, which shines for 16 hours after seven hours in direct sun, help support the Australian Himalayan Foundation. kathmandu.com.au

Idiot fruit tree *Idiospermum australiense*

The world heritage listing of the wet tropics of Queensland in December 1988 was a conservation endorsement of the highest order that covered a range of tenures, including freehold land. Never before or since, has Australia imposed a conservation imperative of international dimension on privately owned land.

It was the discovery of *Idiospermum australiense* in 1971 inside the bellies of six dead cattle that brought global attention to the Daintree rainforest. Isolated relictual Gondwanan pockets containing an exceptional range of primitive flowering plants, called angiosperms, were subsequently discovered in Queensland's wet tropical rainforests. At the time of the discovery, the world knew of 17 families of primitive angiosperms. *Idiospermum australiense* and *Austrobaileya scandans* became the only representatives of the 18th and 19th families. Twelve of these 19 families were found in the Daintree; a concentration of primitive flowering plants not found anywhere else on Earth.

The highest concentration of the 20-metre-tall *Idiospermum australiense* is at the base of the eastern flank of Thornton Peak, known as Wundungu to the traditional owners. It is here, in pristine old-growth rainforest, that the rediscovery of the poisonous 'idiot fruit' is regularly recounted to fascinated travellers from around the world.

Through international cooperation, Australian scientists were able to piece together the story of original discovery of the seed 50 kilometres south of Cairns in 1902. German botanists, funded by the Humboldt Institute, were then being sent to remote places to catalogue rare and unknown plants. When German botanist Ludwig Diels compared some flowers from northern Queensland with records in the Berlin Herbarium and classified the plant as an unknown member of the Calycanthaceae family. It was the first of this family found in the southern hemisphere. Diels needed a second sighting to corroborate his discovery, but he was thwarted by the clear-felling of large tracts of rainforest for sugar cane.

In 1971, the Queensland Herbarium's Stanley Blake was credited with the tree's rediscovery via the poisoned cattle. The discovery of the cricket ball-sized seed was akin to finding a 135-million-year-old dinosaur thought to be extinct, and it is often referred to as the green dinosaur as a result. Blake erected the Idiospermaceae family, but its separation from the Calycanthaceae family of the northern hemisphere was always contentious. With the benefit of DNA testing, the tree was returned to the original Calycanthaceae family but kept the label *Idiospermum* (meaning 'peculiar seed'). A thesis submitted by Stuart Worboys of the Australian Tropical Herbarium in 1998 has contributed substantially to the body of knowledge surrounding this tree, but even now many unknowns remain.

The protected trees, which were previously known to the timber industry as ribbonwood, are limited to creek catchment areas at the base of three granitic inselbergs in the wet tropics section of the Great Dividing Range. Refuges include the Cooper, Hutchinson, Noah and Oliver creeks in the lowlands of Thornton Peak, Harvey Creek near Mount Bellenden Ker and Russell River to the south of Mount Bartle Frere. Trees grow in clusters ranging from 12 to 100 individuals.

Distinct differences exist between trees in the northern catchments and those in the southern catchments, indicating that an obstruction prevented cross-fertilisation between these populations. Most significant is the occurrence of female reproductive structures in the flowers growing in the south, while half of those on trees in the north are just male. According to Worboys, the northern populations could be on their way to having trees of separate sexes.

The tree's sweet-smelling flowers are pollinated by beetles and thrips, are approximately 35 millimetres in diameter and have hemispherical bracts that open to display creamy-white petals. These petals darken from pale pink to deeper pink to cerise over the course



Fallen idiot fruit in the Cooper Creek Wilderness. Photo: Prue Hewett

of two weeks and are seen on the forest floor in the dry months of June and July.

Seeds drop on to the forest floor between January and April, but not annually. Fruiting coincides with the wettest time of the year to facilitate the establishment of the seedlings. The large fruit weighs up to 225 grams and does not appear to have a vector, meaning it is restricted to the base of its parent tree rather than being transmitted through the forest, though it may be aided by gravity. The corky receptacle around the fruit breaks open and probably cushions the fall. Some scientists suggest megafauna, such as a giant wombat found in fossil form in Lakefield, may have been vectors in the past, while others suggest the seeds disperse purely by rolling downhill. The southern cassowary is an important disperser of seeds in the rainforest — 37 different plant species require transmission through the big bird's digestive tract for germination and a further 200 are more likely to thrive if transported away from parent trees—but it does not eat *Idiospermum australiense*. Even with its huge liver, the cassowary shuns the big round seeds, which contain the convulsion-inducing alkaloids calycanthine and idiospermuline. Scientists are currently studying the potential medical uses of idiospermuline as it affects the transmission of messages between nerve cells.

As one of the jewels of the world's oldest surviving rainforest, the idiot fruit tree is one of the most primitive groups of flowering plants on earth and a continuing mystery.

Prue Hewett

Prue Hewett has spent the last 25 years leading interpretive walks in the Daintree rainforest. As custodians of the 65-acre Cooper Creek Wilderness, three generations of her family educate visitors on the old-growth forest's unique flora, fauna and human history.



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Celebrities pledge support for flying foxes

World-renowned conservationist Jane Goodall has pledged her support for the campaign against the culling of flying foxes.

In a letter to Australian authorities in January, Goodall (pictured below) wrote: "The Queensland government is continuing with its plan for lethal dispersal ignoring scientific concerns... we need to have a much greater appreciation of these animals and the vital ecological role they play." She was prompted to speak out when culling continued after heatwaves in southern Queensland caused tens of thousands of flying foxes to perish.



The state government reversed the ban on shooting flying foxes as a method of orchard protection in 2012, against the advice of scientists who cite the high rate of wounding and death by starvation of orphaned young. Up to 10,580 flying foxes—including two threatened species—can now be legally shot in Queensland each year by fruit growers in possession of a permit.

A study by the University of Sydney showed that almost half of the bats shot in a New South Wales orchard in November 2007 took

several hours, and some several days, to die from gunshot wounds.

Steve Amesbury, a spokesman for the Don't Shoot Bats campaign, said: "There are proven, humane alternatives to shooting, and health authorities across the country agree it is safe to live near flying-fox camps."

He added: "Fruit growers can protect their crops more effectively with nets, with different types ranging from \$8k to \$72k per hectare." The New South Wales government currently offers subsidies for flying fox netting and will be phasing out shooting permits from July except for orchardists able to prove 'special circumstances'.

Conservationists believe local governments have been given too free a rein to destroy bat roost sites and drive them out of towns without understanding the impact this can have. Flying foxes provide essential pollination and seed dispersal services, and the movement of smaller populations into urban areas can be attributed to a range of factors—including loss of habitat—rather than indicative of an overall increase in numbers.

Jane Goodall suggested cultural myths about bats have generated an unfounded fear and governments should work harder to educate the public on threats posed by flying foxes.

Two fatalities have officially been recorded as a result of the lyssavirus being passed on in the scratch of an infected flying fox, which campaigners argue represents a lesser threat to health than that posed by bees or domestic dogs. Studies have proved that living near roosts or coming into contact with bat faeces does not pose any risk, while timely medical treatment can vaccinate against the rabies-related virus.



Earlier this year, Hollywood actor and wildlife campaigner Glenn Close was also moved to contact Queensland authorities when plans to disperse Cairns' flying fox colonies were announced.

Close, a regular visitor to Far North Queensland, wrote: "It deeply distresses me that the Cairns City Council is planning to disperse and remove these vulnerable creatures... please do not destroy the enormous educational value and experiential potential of such an exceptional situation." Around 50 other animal welfare organisations, including the Bob Irwin Wildlife & Conservation Foundation, have joined the Don't Shoot Bats campaign since its launch in 2012.



dontshootbats.com

Mountain trees act as planet's thermostat

Ecologists have discovered that tree roots in the mountains play a key role in regulating global temperature. By studying root growth, temperature, humidity, rainfall and soil moisture in the trees of Amazonian lowland forests and the Andes, the scientists proved that warmer temperatures cause tree roots to extend further into the soil's mineral layer and thereby release components that remove carbon dioxide from the air.

Lead researcher Chris Doughty, from the University of Oxford, explained: "The weathering process [breaking down of rocks in the soil] that regulates carbon dioxide in the atmosphere may be buffered by forests that

grow in mountainous parts of the world.

"In the past, this natural process may have prevented the planet from reaching temperatures that are catastrophic for life." Trees in regions such as the Himalayas are particularly helpful regulators as they contain high volumes of volcanic rock, which is highly reactive to weathering.

A separate study of 60,000 trees around the world recently revealed that old trees grow faster and pull more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than their younger counterparts. Giant trees such as Australian mountain ash can grow more than 600 kilograms per year.





Bob Brown's green living

It's now or never if we're to save Leard State Forest, writes Bob Brown

Whitehaven is neither white nor a haven. Together with Japanese-owned Boggabri Coal it has brought hell to the Leard State Forest at Maules Creek near Narrabri in New South Wales. Whitehaven and Boggabri are open-cut black coal mining companies which, backed by a majority of members of the state parliament, are rumbling bulldozers into 3,400 hectares of this ancient forest to destroy it, the air above it, and the soil and water systems beneath it. All this to dig out coal that, when burnt, will inject more greenhouse gases into Earth's atmosphere than New Zealand. The destruction caused by the new and expanded mines will be irremediable.

The Leard State Forest, as its name implies, belongs to the people of New South Wales. The Coalition state government, however, backed by Tony Burke in 2013 while Labor federal minister for the environment, sentenced the forest to destruction despite three years of entreaties and campaigning by local landowners and environmentalists.

At stake is 1,100 hectares of critically endangered box gum woodland sheltering an amazing 28 species of threatened Australian plants and animals.

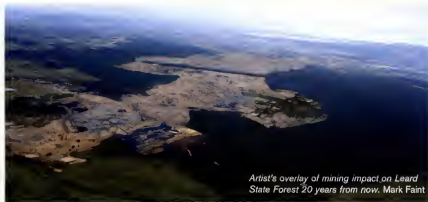
The businessmen and politicians behind the death warrant knew, or were negligent for not knowing, that non-company specialists estimate much less than one per cent of the box gum habitat that flourished in 1788 has survived; the Leard State Forest is a last stronghold. The same forest and wildlife wreckers stand up in front of the flag and talk of their love for Aussie life and values.

Phil Spark is the president of the Northern Inland Council for the Environment. Using just two harp traps in the Leard State Forest one night last December, he caught 246 bats of 10 different species. "I question why the forest has such amazing diversity and abundance of bats. The only possible explanation I can come up with is that it is old-growth box woodland that has in excess of 100 hollows per hectare," he reported.

Sparks also noted 14 threatened species of birds living in the forest, including the turquoise parrot, painted honeyeater and brown treecreeper. This completely unnecessary ecological disaster gives frightening credence to predictions that Australians will drive 25 per cent of our bird species to extinction by 2100, and that the Earth's hordes of Homo sapiens will drive 75 per cent of its bird species off the planet by 2200.

The company and ministers rest easy with an 'offset', so Whitehaven bought some other forest as compensation. Spark's analysis of the Whitehaven and Boggabri offset is pulverising: "I found that creative accounting had been used to overstate the habitat value and area of habitat on the offsets, and the majority of the Whitehaven offset properties had been falsely mapped as white box woodland ... reviewed by three other ecologists, all found the vegetation community to be stringybark open forest."

ANZ is Whitehaven's banker. The federal and state Coalition and Labor MPs approved the disaster. They do not deserve your support. To help the defenders of this magnificent little remnant of natural Australia with your moral, physical or financial backing, or for more information, contact pdspark@activ8.net.au or visit maulescreek.org.



Artist's overlay of mining impact on Leard State Forest 20 years from now. Mark Paine

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Lights out for the reef

The Earth Hour initiative, which sees around seven million Australians switch off their lights and host candlelit gatherings to highlight the impacts of climate change each year, is being relaunched with a focus on the Great Barrier Reef for 2014.

The event, founded by the World Wildlife Fund in Sydney in 2007, will take place on March 29—a few days before the release of the fifth United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report.

A 30-minute, crowd-funded documentary about the impacts of climate change on the reef will be screened on the night on Channel 10 and at community events in Manly, Townsville, Paramatta, Melbourne and Perth.

Earth Hour manager Anna Rose said: "We hope that by telling a story about a place that is dear

to the hearts of Australians, and one of the most vulnerable ecosystems in the world, our message will resonate."

Rose believes the federal government's recent approval for dredge spoil to be dumped within Great Barrier Reef Marine Park will help "turn Earth Hour on its axis" from a single event to a year-round campaign.

"We can already see how global temperature rises are affecting sea turtles on the reef, as rising sea levels destroy their nesting sites and warmer sand increases the feminisation of hatchlings, while ocean acidification and higher sea temperatures have led to widespread coral bleaching," she added.

Scientists believe the damage wrought on the reef by climate change—including intensified cyclones—will be irreversible by 2030 unless

we curb carbon pollution, with around half its coral cover destroyed in the past 27 years.

Following the annual switch-off, 50 Earth Hour participants will be selected to take part in a training camp with researchers out on the reef in May.

WWF-Australia will also launch a nationwide series of climate crisis projects under the Earth Hour Action banner.

Rose added: "It makes me really sad to hear politicians talking about short-term economic benefits in relation places like the reef, and I hope Earth Hour reminds Australians that we need to be thinking about the long term."



earthhour.org.au

Taking to the streets

Protesters including members of the Australian Student Environment Network took to the streets of Sydney (pictured), Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth in early February to campaign against plans for dredge spoil to be dumped in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Following an example set in New Zealand in 2012 for the Whanganui River, the Environmental Defenders Office of northern Queensland is campaigning for the reef to become a legal identity so it can be defended in court in the same way as a person would be.



Photo: Al Bloom

Red crabs out in force

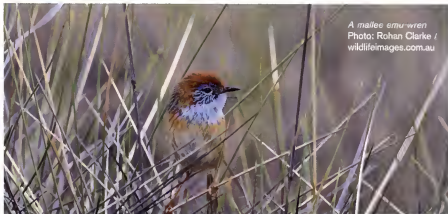


Photo: Deborah Jackson-Smith

Christmas Islanders reported the biggest gathering of red crabs at Ethel Beach yet during the annual spawning in December.

Crowds gathered on the island's beaches at 4am on Boxing Day to witness the natural spectacle in which millions of female land crabs emerge from mating burrows to release their eggs into the Indian Ocean at high tide. A recent study by the Australian National University's Dr Allison Shaw revealed that lack of rain can cancel the red crab migration entirely, subsequently affecting species that rely on them for food, such as whale sharks. Each November, Parks Australia staff construct temporary fencing to funnel the migrating crabs away from traffic on their journey from the rainforest to the beach to mate, and lay toxic bait for predatory yellow crazy ants.

Fires wipe out native birds



The fires that swept across Victoria and South Australia in January killed entire populations of threatened native birds.

Fires at South Australia's Billiatt and Ngarkat conservation parks destroyed the only remaining populations of endangered mallee emu-wren in the state, making Murray-Sunset National Park the final stronghold of the endemic species with around 1,000 birds.

There are now only 600 or so black-eared miners remaining in South Australia following fires in Bookmark Biosphere Reserve, and one

of only two populations in Victoria was destroyed when lightning ignited blazes in Bronzewing Flora and Fauna Reserve.

Dr Rohan Clarke from Monash University said: "The fact that we lost several significant bird populations in fires linked to a single heatwave highlights just how vulnerable many of these species are.

"To better manage risk we need well-funded recovery programs where the establishment of separate populations is a key measure of success," he added.

Another fire could mean the extinction of the mouse-sized mallee emu-wren, which can only fly up to 10 metres at a time.

The University of Adelaide's Dr Rebecca Boulton, who is chair of the black-eared miner recovery team, leads a recovery effort that includes releasing captive-bred females into new colonies.

She said: "With land clearance isolating and restricting many species distributions, large bushfires now seriously threaten many species survival.

"Birds like the black-eared miner and mallee emu-wren have little chance of ever naturally repopulating these burnt-out areas due to the highly fragmented mallee landscape, coupled with their limited dispersal capabilities." Scorched land is uninhabitable by emu-wrens for at least 15 years, and up to 40 years for miners.

The recent review of Australia's bird fauna listed 27 bird species as extinct since European colonisation, with 20 now considered at imminent risk of extinction, a further 20 classified as critically endangered and 60 endangered.

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ec INSIGHT

Tricia Curtis, SA state manager for Conservation Volunteers Australia, tells *Wild* about her life and work in the outdoors



I grew up walking the English countryside and remember my dad teaching me about the value of wildlife and not letting me pick the flowers. I trained in horticulture and used to bring my gardening students on Conservation Volunteers Australia projects before I realised there's more to life than petunias.

I've worked for CVA for about 15 years all up and my current role as South Australia state manager involves helping program managers secure grants and partner with other community groups as we receive no ongoing government funding. I enjoy seeing landowners blown away by what volunteers can achieve, when the biggest challenge for today's conservationists is apathy.

There's no minimum time commitment for volunteers and we have programs ranging from track maintenance and seed

planting to in-depth citizen science such as vegetation and warren surveys. We lease Brookfield Conservation Park for the purpose of protecting and researching the southern hairy-nosed wombat, for example, help operate a Tassie devil retirement village, and work to control the yellow crazy ant infestation in Cairns.

One of our most popular programs is surveying yellow-footed wallabies in the Flinders Ranges, which is hard yakka, and we have another studying echidnas on Kangaroo Island. I recently joined some schoolchildren on a project helping to build possum boxes and the kids were just amazed that they were trusted with such a job and got to learn outdoors. Our Naturewise programs are aimed at people who want to combine volunteering with touring a particular area, and we also run disaster recovery projects in which you help with things like building flood barriers.

Volunteer numbers have remained steady at about 1,200 Australian and New Zealanders each year, but the conservation issues are increasing. I think there are a lot of people out there who marvel at David Attenborough's documentaries but don't realise they have it all on their doorstep.

When I'm not out and about on a program I love hiking in the Adelaide Hills and along the coast, especially if it ends with a good meal. I'm quite spoilt with where I live and work.

New face for the ACF

The former chief of charitable group Environment Victoria, Kelly O'Shanassy, has been appointed head of the Australian Conservation Foundation.

She said: "I take on this role knowing there has never been a more important time for strong leadership for Australia's environment. Our oceans, rivers, land and forests provide the resources needed by every Australian, yet these ecosystems are under immense pressure from global warming and wasteful use of natural resources."

Outgoing chief executive Don Henry is stepping down after 15 years to pursue academic interests.

Fires worst in young forest

New research from the University of Melbourne has found that bushfires in young ash forests burn more intensely, and therefore do more damage, than those in forests that have been standing longer.

In February, researcher Chris Taylor told the annual Australian Forests and Climate Forum in Canberra that clearfell logging and increasingly regular bushfires are together reducing the age of ash forests to a point where the ecosystem cannot regenerate.

Mountain ash trees only produce seed at around 20 years of age.

Woodchips

In January almost 70,000 people signed an online petition against moves to roll back world heritage listing for around 74,000 hectares of Tasmanian forest. Roughly 40 per cent of the signatures came from overseas. Advocacy group Get-Up, together with Environment Tasmania and the Wilderness Society, has launched a similar petition at getup.org.au/tas-forests. The federal government's delisting proposal will be considered at a meeting of the World Heritage Committee in June.

The Australian Koala Foundation has lodged a formal submission condemning the federal government's draft Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation

Act referral guidelines for koala protection. AKF chief executive Deborah Tabart said the guidelines were more about reducing the workload for government than protecting koalas, citing basic errors about koala behaviour that would make life easier for developers.

A number of wildlife protection organisations have united to launch an online platform that allows whistleblowers to share information about wildlife traffickers and illegal loggers in confidence or anonymously. WildLeaks.org went live in February with the support of conservation groups in South Africa, the US, UK and the Netherlands.

Cocoparra Nature Reserve near Griffith was closed to the public on the weekend of February 15-16 as the site of the first hunting trial in a New South Wales national park, with licensed amateur shooters invited to shoot feral goats. More than 200 members of the Sporting Shooters Association registered to take part in the three-year trial across 12 national parks and reserves.

The Victorian government has given the green light for five parts of the Alpine National Park, one area of Lake Eildon National Park and two sections of Lerderderg State Park to be opened to fossickers, despite a warning by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council that rivers and creeks could be damaged.

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Harbour Bridge from Cremorne Point
Photo: Quentin Chester



Harbouring nature

Look closer at the cracks and curves of our glitziest city and you'll find nature in full bloom, writes *Quentin Chester*

I love walking Sydney. Always have. Take Cremorne Point on the emerald city's lower north shore. This skinny witch's finger of land bristles with undergrowth. Admittedly, the trek to the tip is the briefest of journeys. Skip past blocks of flats, a few strides on a concrete path, a bit of banksia scrub and whamo, you're there. Even so, it takes you to the brink, a sandstone bluff overlooking one of most the raggedly handsome settlements on the planet. And the walk is free; anyone can go there.

Sydney is a triumph of geography over common sense. Everywhere you turn there are nooks and watery crannies. For our old seafarer settlers it was a dream come true. So many places to places to park your barque! But as terrain for car travel, forget it. If a truck rolls in the tunnel or

somebody gets a flat on the bridge it's game over. Even on a good morning the road network has more bottlenecks than the back of Birdsville pub on race day.

Here the only transport that goes in a straight line are the ferries. And if you watch the besuited hoofing it down to Cremorne Point's wharf every morning, it's obvious the smart money travels by water. A jolly little boat ride and you're at the Quay before you can tell your broker to sell, sell! On the other hand, the very labyrinth that makes Sydney so tricky to commute in makes it one of the world's best cities for a dilettante who snoops around on foot.

Most of our capitals have the odd patch of scrub here and there; places where you can dawdle among riverside vegetation and walk beside burly, pre-settlement trees.

In the case of Hobart and Canberra there are even some half-decent mountain peaks close by, the kind of fetching summits that cop an occasional smattering of snow.

These days I connive to spend as little time as possible in cities. They usually seem like strange, hollowed-out places. I'm now that much of a bumpkin that traffic lights, sirens and shopping crowds get me all twitchy. Thus town visits have become strategic raids: abrupt sorties to see friends or transits en route to someplace a whole lot nicer.

If I do linger in the big smoke I like to walk. At sauntering speed there's a connection. Plus the chance of sighting a bird, an overgrown bougainvillea in someone's backyard or a hidden, cubby-like patch of parkland; anything to feed the need for nature. In this regard, Sydney

is endlessly entertaining. It's the perfect place for a roaming spectator. The harbour-side abounds with vegetation-filled gullies and craggy alcoves.

Not to mention promontories. From Cremorne Point you look east to the bushy green prow of Bradleys Head. And from there you can ogle at Chowder Head, Georges Head, Middle Head and right across to the brooding ramparts of North Head. All excellent places to rummage around on. There's bush and birdlife. There's the salty air and the sound of the wind in the casuarinas and waves slopping against sandstone bluffs and platforms. The CBD craziness feels a million miles away.

Years ago, when I first moved to Sydney, I dosed for a while at a mate's place in Surry Hills. It was a smallish flat and I slept in the spare bedroom beneath his baby grand piano. On weekends I walked. Long schleps straight down Crown Street to The Domain and Rushcutters Bay. In the stifling late-summer heat the cool northeasters slipping off the harbour were a gift.

As the weeks went by I roamed further. There were walks beside Lane Cove River with its lush understorey and drippy eucalypt forests. I even made the epic two-hour bus trip north to Palm Beach just so I could stroll out along the Barrenjoey Peninsula, hug the lighthouse and gaze at the sweep of Pittwater and little Lion Island sitting proud at the entrance to Broken Bay. A fantastic place to visit but hopeless as a commute to downtown.

On another Sunday I took the ferry to Manly, toddled across the beach and climbed around to North Head. It was a sweltering afternoon and a huge dark storm rolled in over the heads. From the lookout I hightailed it back to the ferry but even before I made it to Collins Beach the clouds burst and huge splodges of rain hissed off the hot bitumen. I got drenched. But it didn't matter, I just soaked up the wildness of it all.

For a boy from straight-laced Adelaide, with its sensible grid of city streets, Sydney was out of control. Compared to the bleached stiffness of a dry South Australian summer, the harbour and its hinterlands were like one pumpin' party after another.

Looking back, what got to me wasn't so much the sparkly water and postcard views of the bridge and opera house. The thing I really liked was the insistent vigour of the place. All that brash weather. The floods and southerly busters. The heaving ocean

swells and the rampant vegetation.

It always felt like the city was a makeshift arrangement with its loopy terrain and forces of nature.

Wherever you walked there seemed to be ferns sprouting from old brickwork and fig-tree roots lifting pavements. Subterranean aquifers seeped from sandstone outcrops and roadside cuttings streaked in black algae. This was a town of spores and soupy air. A place where backyards were crammed with palms, screechy birds and thickets of lantana.

Now—as then—I'm consoled by this unruly energy. Nature presses close, it's coming at you. What's not to like about a town whose ocean shoreline is buttressed by savage cliff lines and slammed by four-metre waves? Or beaches where swimmers occasionally face-off with sharks, rays and the occasional southern right whale?

I'm also encouraged by the fact that it's not another amorphous metropolis subdued by developers. In ecological terms Sydney might be degraded, but it retains its status as a loose collection of geographical ghettos: bays, peninsulas, ravines and hunky plateaus. This diced-up landscape shapes how people live and think. It's no accident that Sydney has such ardent subcultures, tribes fiercely loyal to their patch of surf, sand, creek or bushland.

Of course, as a base to live and work and do business such environs are madly impractical. But if your habit is to rat around in the bush there's plenty close by to keep you content. But push out further, past the warrens of suburbia, and you enter into an incredible arc of sandstone ruggedness. Fancy the wild stuff? Need to trek, climb, paddle or lob into a canyon? These highlands and hinterlands are for you.

As my stay in Sydney unfolded it was no great stretch to head north of town to wander Ku-ring-gal Chase National Park. The tracks dipping from West Head to the spurs and bays around Pittwater felt like a higher-keyed version of many harbour walks. There were the same banksia heaths and gritty sandstone terraces. Along the quieter creeks, where angophoras clung to slopes close to the water's edge, you didn't have to work hard to imagine what a sight the pre-1788 Port Jackson must have been.

Heading west to the Blue Mountains was a different story. I bought my Dunlop Volleys and did my time in the Blueys. Spent weekends mooching about the blue gum forest in the Grose Valley. Did a few

days of climbing at Mount Victoria.

Abseiled and floated down canyons. Wandered the Wollongambe. I even managed the occasional scramble from Kanangra Tops deep into the Kowmung River. It was all heart-pumping stuff.

Looking back, however, maybe this terrain was just a little too die-hard for my tastes. There was something about those plunging descents into river valleys. Call me a wimp, but being confined so far down in wooded ravines felt, well, unnerving. There was the occasional glimpse of the craggy escarpment glowering brightly on the skyline, but that was it. I got the seclusion of these places, their precious wildness and sanctity. The thing is, I missed the sky. I needed a horizon to perve at.

No, in my book, for the quintessential ex-Sydney walking experience you head south out of town. Make for Cronulla and jump aboard the ferry across Port Hacking to Bundeena. You weave through the backstreets, get to the end of the aptly named Beachcomber Avenue and hit the trail (aka The Coast Track), Royal National Park's famous seaside ramble.

For my first time on the 26-kilometre Bundeena-to-Orford walk we did the thing in a day. It was springtime and the sky was grey and overcast. There was a fresh sea breeze too. Good weather for walking. And even though we didn't have time to hang around, the track's message came through loud and strong.

I loved every minute of the journey: the wave and weather scoured cliffs, the heath in full flowery flourish, the rushing waterfalls and trickly creeks. Everyone waxes about the beaches like Little Marley and Little Garie, but for me it was the flow of the walk that grabbed me. There was something almost musical about the variations on a theme as you contoured from rocky prow to sandy beach, and winding creek to the forest primeval.

Over the years I've returned quite a few times to Royal and The Coast Track. Naturally, it's a little different according to the pulse of the season. But there is always that scenicomy feel as the vignettes of scenery unfold and the waves thump below. Here, on a pocket of unspoiled coast, all of Sydney's overgrown and feral charms are writ large. Not just that, but there's sky aplenty. W

Quentin Chester is a freelance journalist and author of six books about wilderness places. Quentinchester.com



Chris Turney talking to the media via Skype from the top deck of Akademik Shokalskiy in a blizzard

In the name of science

Climate scientist *Chris Turney* made global headlines over Christmas when his Antarctic expedition ship became trapped in sea ice. Here, he tells *Wild* why the experience has far from dulled his love of exploration

The blogosphere has not been kind to British-born Chris Turney, professor of climate change at the University of New South Wales and leader of the recent Australasian Antarctic Expedition. When he was awarded the Frederick White Prize for contributions to the understanding of natural phenomena in January, ill-informed bloggers jumped to relive the so-called irony that a researcher of global warming had been caught in unexpected ice for 10 days. The fact it is not wholly unusual for Antarctic vessels to become stuck, or that the unpredictability of conditions since a berg the size of the ACT collided with the

Mertz Glacier tongue in 2010 itself justified the research mission, did not stop them dismissing the scientists onboard as 'eco-doom tourists' on a 'polar party cruise'. Many seemed to forget that the recent expansion of ice in Antarctica, due partly to strengthening circumpolar winds, cannot be classed an offset for melting ice in the Arctic. Unfortunately, the estimated \$2.4 million price tag of the four-nation rescue effort for the 56 stranded passengers of the chartered MV Akademik Shokalskiy, and subsequent delays to other scientific operations, did not help Chris's case for a new brand of citizen science in one of the

world's most hostile and scientifically important regions. There have been calls to curb privately funded trips since. But whether the stranding can be blamed on human error or weather or both, it would surely be a tragedy if the steps taken forward for science during the expedition were forgotten in the aftermath.

"We were really unfortunate to be caught by a massive ice breakout, it was incredibly bad timing," explains Chris. "Any experienced Antarctic scientist knows you can get caught, it's more common than the newspapers made out."

He says colleagues have generally been very supportive through the bad press.

"I made an effort to engage the public early on via all sorts of social media and it's fascinating, despite that, how quickly things were taken out of context, with claims we were doing a re-enactment for example."

"This expedition crystallised for me how much scientists need to take a step back and explain exactly how they are testing ideas," he adds.

Two years in the planning, and stemming from Chris's book 1912: *The Year the World discovered Antarctica*, the six-week trip sought to celebrate the centenary of Sir Douglas Mawson's original Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911-1914. After a tour of the New Zealand subantarctic islands, the multidisciplinary team of researchers picked up 23 paying members of the public before exploring the Southern Ocean and the area around Mawson's huts in Commonwealth Bay.

Like Mawson, Chris relied on corporate funding and the interest of the masses, but the expedition was first and foremost a study of how fluctuations in the region are impacting global oceanographic and atmospheric systems, and in turn affecting weather in Australia and New Zealand.

He explains: "It was only when I started organising the expedition that I realised how many areas of science would spin off from it. Because we weren't dependent on government agencies telling us who to take, we were able to recruit the best people from each field who we knew would be good team players. It ended up being not only the largest but also the friendliest group I've been down with."

Chris had previously been part of much smaller private expeditions to Antarctica and South Georgia and found Mawson's area of exploration "too exciting to ignore". Inspired by the success of online citizen science programs such as Project Noah, and the opportunity to extend climatic records by hundreds of years (by studying ice and peat cores for example), Chris's team took the risk of chartering a \$30,000-a-day former Russian spy ship and opened the expedition to the public.

He says: "The media suggested that because we weren't government-funded we weren't doing science, but what we were doing was looking at other ways of getting science done."

"Our passengers—who were vetted by Adventure Associates [run by Australian geologist-mountaineer and expedition co-leader Greg Mortimer]—were given the opportunity to relax but most got involved in every aspect of the scientific work that they could, which created a real buzz about the ship."

Those experiments included bird counts and adélie penguin surveys, examining

how glacial shifts are affecting biodiversity, and a 40-hour assessment of ocean circulation, salinity and temperature that involved dropping, tracking and recovering drifter buoys. This and many other tests carried out were firsts for the region.

Chris says: "One of the brilliant things about being in Antarctica is the sheer act of observing and trying to understand why, for example, the sea ice is two kilometres further north in Commonwealth Bay than it was 100 years ago." He is particularly excited about having found a new route into the historic base at Cape Denison—one of the windiest places on Earth—over 65 kilometres of uncharted sea ice, and about collecting geological samples that will reveal how a 2,500-kilometre stretch of the east Antarctic ice sheet behaved in the past.

Experts in tree-ring dating and peat cores were also in their element,

past geological tipping points can tell us about the future and is disappointed when debates about climate change conflate science with questions of policy.

He says: "While it's hard to say by how much [extreme weather] events are driven by human activity, we can say without doubt that we'll see more of these extremes in the future." Retreating Antarctic winds, for example, are contributing to drier winters in Australia.

The latest Australasian Antarctic Expedition brought together data on everything from ocean cores to seal blubber to tree rings with the aim of better understanding past and impending tipping points. The team hopes to have the majority of the data crunched before the end of the year. Chris says: "I'm really pleased with how much we achieved, there are some questions you just can't answer via satellite."

Chris with ornithologist Kerry-Jane Wilson (and an emperor penguin)



collecting samples that will help us understand past ecologies and changes to the carbon cycle. "The amount of information contained in something so, well, boring-looking is quite amazing," says Chris.

In what he calls a "humbling time" for scientists, with research funding becoming harder and harder to secure, Chris relishes the power of social media to communicate directly with the public about scientific endeavours. "We're all still innately interested in the world and I'm not just writing papers for my fellow scientists," he explains. "It's an incredible privilege to go to these places and technology allows us to take people there virtually."

Chris has always been interested in what

Meanwhile, his admiration for Mawson, whose detailed century-old records have been vital to studies of global warming, has grown immeasurably. Both men only received permission to visit the subantarctics a few days before setting out and both were famously trapped in the ice. "The poor man lost two people and stayed stuck another year, I can only imagine that level of frustration and difficulty, I had enough pressure on this trip!" says Chris. "They were off the map, but even with satellite imagery this environment quickly lets you know you're only a visitor. You can't help but be in awe of it." [W](http://www.spiritofmawson.com)



spiritofmawson.com



A remote village in the eastern Himalayas
Photos: Andrew Davison

GARDEN OF EDEN

The unspoilt country, staggering views and thoughtful people of north-western Bhutan captivate *Andrew Davison* on a 10-day trek



Leah O'Neil on the Laya-Gasa Trek

Happiness is a place. It is where the trekking trails are quiet and wildlife abundant, the climate is pleasant and the views rewarding. It is where glistening snowcapped mountains heave into the distance, piercing a deep blue sky, and mountain streams barrel down precipitous slopes. It is where the children beg for their photo to be taken and nothing else. Happiness is where hospitable hamlets sit on terraced mountain sides and herders doze in the sun as their yaks graze the grassy slopes. It is where sacred monasteries sit precariously on sheer cliffs and fluttering prayer flags line high ridges and passes, where traditions abound and culture is strong. It is where the mules do the hard work and you travel light, where the air is fresh and forests remain standing. Happiness is a place that has defied globalisation and chosen to remain a hidden paradise. It is a place where development is judged on Gross National Happiness (GNH) as opposed to Gross Domestic Product. Happiness is the small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

Trekking in Bhutan is possibly unlike trekking anywhere else in the world. Its network of mountain trails, which have linked highland villages for millennia, provide trekkers with spectacular scenery and an insight into an almost forgotten world, where the tradition of semi-nomadic life and subsistence living is continued with minimal change. What also makes it a unique trekking destination is

the Bhutanese government's goal of achieving development and economical prosperity guided by the philosophy of GNH. It is an approach based around Buddhist teachings and recognition of the country's small, pristine and fragile eco- and social system, which has led to a tourism industry based on high value but low volume. This tight control means that trekking can be only undertaken with an entourage consisting of a guide, a cook and assistant, mules and muleteers, as part of an organised tour.

Before visiting Bhutan, I had never had such an amount of attention directed toward me on a trek before. And with mules to lug my gear, cooks to provide three three-course meals a day and assistants to erect my tent, I found the novelty of tour-walking a little confronting, but certainly comfortable, relaxing and happiness-inducing.

In the shadow of the Himalayas I stared amazed at the mountainous pile of equipment was sorted. Spread around us was a tent for cooking, a tent for dining, another for sleeping and another for showering, table and chairs, fresh meat, fruit and vegetables, all being crammed into hessian sacks and loaded on to six melancholic-looking mules. It seemed a decadent amount of gear for 10 days trekking for only two people.

The sun was beginning to break over the towering hills as we set out along the rough road through various villages,

leaving the muleteer and cook to struggle with the cumbersome load of gear and stubborn pack animals. Between mule-tilled fields and through farm yards, the clucks and shrill cock-a-doodle-dos followed us from the small foothill village of Drukkel along the Paro Chhu river. Bashful children scurried past clothed in gho and kira (the traditional dress for men and women) on their way to school.

At a narrow swingbridge the road ended. We followed in the wake of our guide and assistant cook, who carried our packed lunch, and continued along the network of footpaths across fields, past the veranda of traditional rammed-earth houses and deeper among the towering mountains. Soon, the valley sides steepened and numerous tracks merged, forming a well-worn path. The fields were replaced by forest and the Paro Chhu roared ahead.

Occasionally the banks of the river became terraced fields again, dotted with quaint rammed-earth or stone houses. In the shade of a blue pine, we found a soft mossy patch among the fields of potato, wheat and red rice on which to spread a blanket and our array of lunch dishes. From across the valley, the general sounds of farm clamour rang out; men chopping firewood, young boys whistling and hollering to coax their animals along and women comforting the babies on their backs while tending to their daily chores. I gazed up at a clear, polarised blue sky and breathed in the crisp air with a slight tang of wood fire.



Breasts of burden make light work of the slopes



Bhutanese children pose with the writer's pack mule

Steep pine-clad mountainsides shot from the riverbed 100 metres skyward and rare glimpses between the rhododendron, birch and oak revealed a grand vista of the world's greatest mountains

farmland behind, the trail took on more of a wilderness feel. The cloud forest enveloped the sky as we crossed rushing streams and climbed steadily along the steep flanks of the Paro Chhu. The soft mountain waters had carved an ever-deepening valley that we followed further into the mature forest. Steep pine-clad mountainsides shot from the riverbed 100 metres skyward and rare glimpses between the rhododendron, birch and oak revealed a grand vista of the world's greatest mountains.

The defined path was a narrow strip worn smooth by mule hooves and the herders' boots across the steepening slope of mud, stone and rock. What we planned to walk in four days the local villagers would cover in two.

After warming our oxygen-deficient muscles over a hot lunch beside the river, we followed our guides up the increasingly steep valley. Rounding a bend at 3,500 metres, the canopy opened and we enjoyed our first real glimpse of the 7,314-metre Mount Jhomolhari, framed by a stupa and colourful prayer flags. Another 100 metres brought us to a small grove of cedar and

our campsite for the night.

The next morning I squinted up at Jhomolhari's ice encrusted summit before it again disappeared behind ridges and folds in the landscape. As our trail continued past military check posts and through small villages, then up above the treeline, the grunts of yaks in the surrounding brush seemed to match our own. I was almost higher than I had ever been on foot and yet still walking in barley and potato fields.

We passed a small clinic and administration centre before setting up the foldable table and chairs for lunch. I felt as if I were touching distance from the intimidating peak. That night was spent just a few metres from the ruins of an ancient dzong, or fort.

I sensed the cook knew something we didn't when I saw the size of our breakfast the following day. Sure enough, after a friendly conversation with a family of yak herders, we began scaling a scree slope to the 4,870-metre summit of Mount Nyile La. The surrounding mountains came into view amid bitter winds, with unnamed and unscaled 6,000-metre icy pinnacles stretching the length of the horizon.

A line of heavily loaded mules rounded the bend and trotted past us in single file. We followed their surefooted steps over the rocky trail into Sharan Zampa, a small clearing at 2,850 metres beside a thunderous stream: our campsite for the first night.

We woke inside a frosted tent on frozen ground, but the hilltops were already bright with autumn sun. Leaving the campsite and

The bright sky of early afternoon held not a single cloud and in the distance to the north was nothing but summits, sacred and imposing.

Watching the mules trot across the icy slope gave me confidence to edge across myself, and the warmth of the dung fire was much appreciated that evening in Lingzhi. I also appreciated a warming mug of yak's butter tea, though the liquidised blue-cheese taste is not for everyone.

Inside the stone home of one herder

I observed all the necessities of a remote existence, including a single solar light bulb and sacks of rice and flour to last six months, which were most likely procured in exchange for yak meat and wool.

Through our guide, I fired questions at our hosts for the night. How far was the nearest school? Where did expectant mothers go? What if there was a medical emergency? The children went to boarding school, mothers had long been giving birth with only family assistance and what could

not be treated at home could be treated at the nearest clinic. I discovered that a road to Bhutan's small mountain communities was proposed, residents decided it would not be conducive to their lifestyle, and so the idea was scrapped.

As I drifted into peaceful sleep that night I considered how easy it is for bushwalkers to relate to the Bhutanese focus on physical, mental and spiritual health over materialism. As detached as it might seem from the modern world, Gross National Happiness made a lot of sense to me.

With the scent of yak and damp earth rising in the autumn breeze we returned to our traverse of steep-sided ridges. We eventually descended to the hamlet of Goyul amid golden fields and passed through its narrow, hay-strewn streets.

Next it was on to the stunning village of Chebisa set on a crystal-clear brook with a backdrop of mountainous escarpments and a waterfall. You could not be anything but happy living here I thought. From here the mountains appeared to me an endless, impenetrable wilderness, rather than a narrow line between two continental shelves that is regularly crossed in numerous locations by hardy locals trading with their Tibetan neighbours.

Continuing on, I sensed our proximity to the next village as the animal density increased. When Laya made its appearance over a ridge, however, it was still surprising. The 3,700-metre-high village beneath Mount Gangchenta is one of the world's most remote, and the language and customs of the Layap people distinguish them from other Bhutanese communities. Layap women, for example, are easily identified by their yak's wool skirts and conical bamboo hat.

The next few days offered up giddy views along an escarpment edge as we followed the Mo Chhu river down through the mountains and faced our first pattering of snow.

On the final morning of the trek I watched as the sun rose and villagers moved up the trail with their dozen donkeys carrying food supplies, solar panels and other gadgets. Youths wandered past playing music on their mobile phones, proving the people of Bhutan have the same aspirations as the rest of the world thought they hold them in a different order of preference.

The reward of trekking in Bhutan is unique. It's not the conquering-a-mountain-trail type of satisfaction, but the satisfaction that comes from the knowledge that a place exists where the natural environment and spiritual wealth are highly valued. **W**



EXPERT VIEWPOINT

Wild talks to James Irving, director of Gold Coast-based travel agency Bhutan & Beyond

Is Bhutan a popular destination among bushwalkers?

Only 7.5 per cent of international tourists undertake a structured trek while in Bhutan, but Aussies make up a large percentage of those. The main ones include the Jhomolhari Trek (for those with alpine experience), the Dagala 1000 Lakes (for which you need to have good fitness), and the Bumthang Owl Trek. We also offer the newer, easier, three to four-night Samtengang-Nobding trek. You encounter fewer walkers than in other Himalayan destinations because all the treks are privately guided. My partner and I plan trips for around 400 Australians each year.

What first attracted you?

I first discovered Bhutan on a charity journey to every country in the world in 2002-2003. It was by far the most delightful and unusual destination I set foot in, with its untouched culture and sense of optimism. The countryside is relatively untouched and there is a legislated minimum forest cover of 60%. The scenery is at times spectacular and never dull, plus the Bhutanese speak great English.

Are there common misconceptions about Bhutan?

The main one is that there's a limit on the number of visitors granted a visa at one time, when actually tourism is limited solely by number of airline seats available, which is increasing each year. People also assume it's expensive but Bhutan offers exception value for money even with the government's nightly tariff. I warn travellers that many Bhutanese find bartering offensive and tipping is generally discouraged outside your trekking crew.

Has Bhutan changed much since it opened to tourism in 1974?

I've visited regularly for over a decade and watched increasing development in the two main western valleys of Thimphu and Paro, but there is little obvious change in the central and more remote eastern regions. The GNH concept is still undergoing transformation from concept to implementation, but I think Bhutan remains a bastion of hope in terms of a society moving forward with positive values for the preservation of the environment.

Can trekkers be confident they're contributing to sustainable development?

There's a great deal going on behind the scenes lending support for forest management, waste solutions and a relatively new government commitment to regular trash clean-ups on all major trekking trails.

Besides trekking, which activities do you recommend?

Cultural treks that stop by dzong fortresses and monasteries are popular, and mountain biking is increasingly accessible. Mountaineering is forbidden, to protect the sanctity of the peaks, but there are rafting opportunities in the Punakha Valley for beginners and expert kayaking routes on rivers such as Mo Chhu. bhutan.com.au



Mt Masagang, a romantic rocky ridge near the centre. Photo: Colin Walker

Love is in the air

Noelene Proud gets more than she bargained for in Bhutan's Tgotserkhao Chhu valley

When my partner Colin and I first met at a bushwalking club it was not long before we got to talking about Bhutan and how much we'd both love to walk in the remote valley beneath the 7,200-metre Mount Masagang. Boasting three summits, Masagang was climbed only once, in 1985 by a Japanese team, before the Bhutanese government banned mountaineering altogether for religious reasons 10 years ago.

After two years together, Colin and I found ourselves in the village of Laya, having added a few days on to the Laya-to-Gasa trek so we could get a look at the mysterious peak.

Trekking north, we followed a path through a forest alive with bright red finches and black-faced laughing thrushes. After two hours, we emerged from the forest on to a bare, windswept valley dotted with a few nomad dwellings with solar panel-equipped tarpaulin roofs. We passed a mother taking her newborn to the health clinic in Laya—a three day trip from her home—and a family en route to enrol the children

in boarding school. After a long day's walk, we made camp at 4,200 metres. Our guide explained the path would continue to a mountain pass on the Tibetan border and that 'Masa', meaning lump of butter, refers to this historic trading route.

Despite the late afternoon sunshine, the wind was chilling and ice formed on our tent. Being careful not to twist an ankle in a marmot hole, we admired 7,100-metre Mount Terigang, while Masagang remained in cloud.

An early start the next day saw us puffing up an extremely steep hillside towards a nameless 5,200-metre peak on the ridge below Masagang that promises spectacular views in clear weather. Willing the cloud to clear, we looked up to see a lone lammergeier, or bearded vulture, circling, while large groups of blue sheep bounded around the hillsides untroubled by the altitude.

Breathing hard, we reached our rocky summit, and the perspective was indeed stunning. Clouds rushed up the steep sides

of Masagang, spilling over the top and revealing views of its three summits. We looked down on a nearby glacier, the sound of water running under it blending with the strong wind, just as a boom behind us signalled a huge avalanche on Mount Tsendagang.

The 360-degree views of the Himalayas had me thinking life could not get any better. Then Colin looked into my eyes, and asked me to marry him. Our guide Tsring seemed almost as surprised as I was, but I managed to stutter out right answer. Turns out, he had planned to propose at Sinche La pass—the planned highest point of our trek at 5,000 metres—but Tsring's suggestion we aim for the nameless peak pushed him to nervously delay another four days.

After some hugs, tears and copious photos we started the descent to camp. Our high point is too small to warrant an official name in Bhutan, but I put forward Proposal Peak for consideration. In my book, it is the most definitely the best spot from which to take in the magnificent Mount Masagang.



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Amphibian ARMY

Frogs and toads get their time in the limelight
thanks to roving photographer *Rob Gray*





Previous page: Cane toad, Bargara, QLD
Clockwise from left: Frog on screw palm leaf, Little Mertens Falls, Kimberley, WA; Toad at Lake Houdraman, Quipile, QLD; Toad eating frog, Lake Houdraman; Frog on pool edge, Purnululu National Park, WA.

In 2000, together with his wife, Rob Gray sold most of his possessions and started a life on the road in a converted army truck. He now spends his time exploring and photographing Australian natural scenes and wildlife. robgray.com



JUST



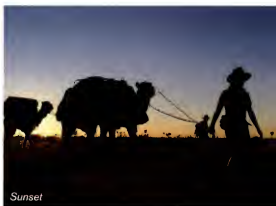
Lise Andriessen with Gabe, Gal and Yabunga in the Simpson Desert.
Photo: Danielle Cornes Andriessen

DESERTS

A compass, a camel and a bag of biscuit crumbs help
Danielle Curnow-Andreasen cross the Simpson



Lisa Andreassen and Steve Dumbay crossing a salt lake midway through the trek



Sunset



Sunrise

Our aim was to cross the Simpson Desert from west to east, walking off-track for 460 kilometres with three semi-trained camels. Starting at Newcrown station about six hours' drive south from Alice Springs we would head east to Poeppel Corner, where the Northern Territory, South Australia and Queensland meet, and finish in Birdsville 23 days later.

One of the benefits of growing up with camels—my parents ran a camel touring company out of Mansfield for 25 years—is that I'd crossed both the Gibson and Great Victoria Desert on foot by the time I was eight. For three months at a time my brother and I would take our school lessons in the sand and spend our recess exploring picturesque gorges.

The challenge of crossing Australia's driest desert, with its 1,200-odd sand dunes, had stayed on the backburner until now. Preparation for such a trip not only involves months of route planning and food dehydrating but also camel training and saddlebag customising.

After an epic car shuffle, we head for McDills Bore. When we reach the bore three days later, having taken time to get

the packing routine right, I notice the sand has become a deeper red and the sand hills higher. We pile the camels three bags high with around 175 kilograms, which allows for five litres of water per person and four per camel per day. While you might imagine the desert as entirely barren, most of the land we cover is dotted with spiky vegetation that makes gaiters essential.

As navigator I frequently find myself alone looking out at endless red hills and, though I know the others are not far behind, it feels as if I am the last person on Earth. The sense of isolation and stillness leave my own thoughts ringing in my head and make it hard to pinpoint whether I have been in the same spot for two minutes or two hours.

Even without a watch we soon get into a military-style routine. Mum and dad get up each day when they can see the Seven Sisters and then wake me when Orion rises so we can breakfast and saddle the camels in time for sunrise. We walk around 16 kilometres (letting the camels nibble on bushes on the way), break for lunch, and then cover a further eight to 11 kilometres before making camp for the night.

OTHER AUSTRALIAN TREKS WITH CAMELS

- Andrew Harper of the Outback Camel Company, and cameleer on *Tracks*, runs a 14-day Western Simpson Desert trek each April priced \$5,160 per person. In May, he will also lead a challenging 21-day expedition taking in the salt lakes north-west of Kallakoopah Creek. camelexpeditions.com
- Family-run Camel Treks Australia in the Flinders Ranges is the only domestic operator to offer combined walking and riding camel safaris. Celebrated photographer Pete Dobre will lead a four-day photography trek in May priced from \$1,400 per person. cameltreksaustralia.com.au
- Coward Springs Camel Tours runs seven-day walking safaris off the Oodnadatta Track through June and July, covering around 15 kilometres a day and priced \$1,650 per person. cowardsprings.com.au



As navigator I frequently find myself alone looking out at endless red hills and, though I know the others are not far behind, it feels as if I am the last person on Earth

The writer getting her bearings
Photo: Lise Andreassen

MOVIE REVIEW: TRACKS

Dir. John Curran



In 1977, Queensland-born Robyn Davidson trekked 2,700 kilometres from Alice Springs to Hamelin Pool on the Indian Ocean with four camels and a dog. The long-awaited film adaptation of her bestselling memoir opens in Australian cinemas on March 6.

Lensed in the deserts of South Australia and the Northern Territory, John Curran's lyrical but not overly romanticising film evokes a visceral connectedness to the land that many would deem uniquely Australian. The incredible cinematography, which relies heavily on natural light and very real dust storms, is the work of the same Mandy Walker lauded for her efforts on Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*. While the camera mostly hovers near the ground as Davidson (played by Mia Wasikowska) trudges across sand and scrub, powerful aerial

shots help us understand the logic and beauty in undertaking such a journey purely for its own sake when characters around the heroine do not.

During the camel-training scenes (when one bushie warns the novice female camel-leader "you don't have to be unlucky to die out there"), Curran makes sure that we hear the mutterings of modern 20-somethings as a clamour we too would want to escape from.

Set at the end of second-wave feminism and early in the Aboriginal land rights movement, *Tracks* reveals Davidson's rejection of any and all stereotypes imposed upon her and on remote communities by the National Geographic photographer who occasionally accompanies her.

Rick Smolan's iconic stills influence many of the pivotal scenes here, but it is when the heroine strips off her clothes to reveal skin as mottled as the surrounding landscape that we realise how violated she must have felt when met by spectacle-seeking tourists in 4WD vehicles.

The easygoing relationship she develops with Aboriginal elder Mr Eddy despite not speaking Pitjantjatjara (played with scene-stealing humour by Rolley Mintuma), drives home Davidson's belief that walking with minimal gear is a cinch once you understand the country. Slow-motion flashbacks speculating that the aim of such an epic journey was to distance herself from childhood trauma cater to those expecting a coming-of-age flick, but Wasikowska's performance throughout makes us realise that the 27-year-old Davidson was craving solitude more than anything. She could not imagine what impact her own tracks would have on the concept of the solo adventurer.

licking plates clean is perfectly adequate since they are colour coded, though this does mean that dad spends much of the trip with leftovers lodged in his beard.

I watch as my skin becomes a dark reddish brown colour, my hands caked in sand and charcoal, and my clothes sun-bleached. I walk and sleep in the same clothes, ranging from multiple layers on mornings that my toothbrush freezes to shorts and t-shirt on baking afternoons.

When you spend time with camels you come to see their distinct personalities. At home, ours were named Gopal, Cal and Yatunga. Out in the desert, Maggot, 4WD and Pumpkin Pie (in an effort to get her

to act nicer) seem far more suitable.

The animals become friendlier as their load decreases and also stop sitting down every two kilometres towards the end of the day, which allows us to teach them to take a rider and to free steer. With mum as camel leader and me navigating, dad is left bringing up the rear as the Iba Man. When the camels want to stop he's the one to shout *ibna* (meaning 'go'), blow the whistle and, when all else fails, push or pull them.

On day 10, Yatunga decides she really doesn't like me and bites my head as I reach for snacks in her front bags. Though it's only a tiny cut, the blood gushes all through my hair and on to the jumper I have to wear for the next fortnight. The minor accident reminds me just how remote we are.

The following day, at around 1am, it starts pouring rain and we run round like headless chooks making sure all the important gear is under the tarp. For the next day and a half we huddle inside the tent while the camels slurp excitedly from the pans we leave out to collect the rainwater. Two days later the flies arrive. They torture us from daybreak until after sunset, swarming round our eyes, ears, mouths and nostrils and turn lunchtime into a nightmare.

While I keep my strength up with fly-covered biscuits, we have to use an increasing number of blankets on the camels backs as they get thinner. These blankets double as our bedding, which is less than pleasant when caked with sweat, rain and sand. Eventually the pillows are also sacrificed.

Having lost time due to the rain, we have 27-kilometre days until we reach Poeppel Corner. The going is hard, up and down sand hills in a zigzag pattern to avoid holes. When mum gets tired and jumps up on one of the camels, and it is

uncharacteristically acquiescent, we joke that she must feel like just another old bag to the animal. For the rest of the trip, we take turns riding the camels for a few kilometres each day.

When we come to the big salt lakes near the meeting point of the states I'm in constant fear that the camels will sink into the ground at the centre, but the detour around is too long to contemplate and they actually only sink around 10 centimetres.

With another week of desert ahead, followed by three days of rocky landscape between Big Red and Birdsville, even the daily highlights of mealtimes cease to inspire. The fresh veggies, curries and

When mum gets tired and jumps up on one of the camels, and it is uncharacteristically acquiescent, we joke that she must feel like just another old bag to the animal

stews that we started out with have given way to crackers with canned tuna and spoonfuls of biscuit crumbs.


When we arrive at our campsite four kilometres out of Birdsville, wanting one more night in the desert, all I can do is grin as tourists in 4WD vehicles line up to take our photo.

The journey across the Simpson is not one I will rush to repeat, as tough as it is on body and mind. Besides, there are other deserts yet for me to explore with the help of my trusty camels. *W*

Danielle Currow-Andreasen is an environments student at the University of Melbourne, an avid bushwalker and climber. She grew up trekking with camels in Victoria's high country.



Steve Currow leads the camels over one of many sandhills




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Sold on SAND

A leisurely six-day walk in Great Sandy National Park in south-east Queensland offers up a wealth of natural treasures for *Rae Sheridan*

Coooloolo Sandpatch
Photos: Rae and John Sheridan



When my five walking companions and I decided to set out on the Cooloolo Great Walk, the trail established between Noosa and Rainbow Beach in 2010, we had no great expectations. We opted for the 88-kilometre inland route starting at the southern end, cutting off the coastal section at the end. This would take us through the heart of dune country on the Cooloolo sandmass, sidling behind an extensive white quartzose beach to the east, across a sand blow to the mesmerising stillness of the Noosa River to the west, and back through heathlands and forests that skirt lakes and swamps. The entire area, known as the Noosa Recreation Area (including Great Sandy

National Park), is in the proposed extension to Fraser Island World Heritage Area and tentatively named the 'Great Sandy World Heritage Area'. Our party felt a certain connection to this landscape—Earth's oldest coastal dune formation—with our 412 cumulative years. There are some offsets to being borderline decrepit though; by ambling rather than fast-hiking you get the chance to pause and eulogise over small delights. So we packed a watchmaker's lens known as a loupe, a lightweight binocular microscope, five cameras, a solar battery charger and an iPod storing Wikipedia.

We cross the Noosa River by a small car ferry from Tewantin and enter a birding extravaganza. While the others set up the

260-kilometre car shuffle, I sit back on the north shore to enjoy solos by blue-faced honeyeaters, kookaburras and magpies. A cacophony of calls from corellas, galahs, cockatoos and lorikeets builds to operatic crescendo in the afternoon light. A stroll along the beach brings me into contact with a patrolling osprey and eastern grey kangaroos savouring the grasses in a region where most plants lack nutritive value.

After dark my husband John and I venture into the bush at the start of the trail with a spotlight, and it's a knockout. Up above and on the ground we see the eyes of hunting spiders, the winking reflections like miniscule lighthouses. Trees and bushes are defined by dewy canopies gleaming silver, and the air is misted with what we dub 'pollen rain'. It feels like spectre-land, a phantasma revealed by LED headlamps. I'm on heightened alert when a moth flies at my light, then when an insectivorous bat speeds by and again when a southern boobook owl makes its distinctive 'mo-poke' call, all while a homeward-bound sugar glider peers at us from on high.

DAY 1: NOOSA NORTH SHORE TO BRAHMINY CAMP (7.3KM)

The track starts a few hundred metres away at Arthur Harrold Nature Refuge and we eventually set off after sampling a Weis ice cream. I decide some free-associative tags will go some way to shoring our memories and suggest 'atmospheric day' to start.

We cross flat heath known as wallum, taking in its stillness and delighting in our first expanse of delicate pink and yellow flowers, as well as hidden sundews.

Then the shade offered by forested dunes changes to the brilliance and breeze of a kilometre stretch of the 50-kilometre-long Teewah Beach. At the end of this section we retreat under sheoaks to wring out sweaty hats, then the track detours inland through paperbarks raucous with honeyeaters.

Leaning heavily on my walking poles, I wonder at the wisdom of carrying a bladder of wine, a kilo of marshmallows, a dozen nut bars, fresh tomatoes, apples and an oversized camera.

A hot cuppa revives us for an afternoon

that begins with a dance through a scrub fire. One member of the group becomes increasingly concerned about his newfangled rubber shoes on the embers, but we're back on the beach by mid-afternoon and then climbing Mount Sewah for views of the brooding Cooloola lakes.

I find myself lagging behind over the next three and a half kilometres through bracken, wattles, gums and cane toads to a scenically positioned campsite named after the Brahminy kite. After setting up camp, and imbibing a mug of wine each,



Blue-faced honeyeater



A native rat known as a melomys

DAY 2: BRAHMINY TO NOOSA RIVER (18KM)

We start day two (the 'day of sand') on a track lined with grass trees, followed by fire-damaged tea tree thickets. We then climb through banksia, scribbly gum and blackbutt forest on to a dune with a 360-degree vista. The only disturbance in the distance are the sea birds fishing in the surf, but nearer to our feet we spot some unusual holes featuring collapsed sausage-shaped extrusions of coloured sand. The identity of the sand swimmer responsible is yet to be nailed by museum



Fulgurate



Mysterious cut nuts

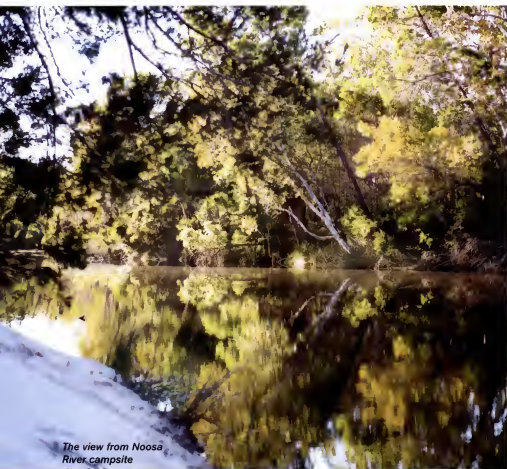
we're disturbed from our sunset reverie by a helicopter patrolling the Noosa River. This was the first of four environmentally sensitive camps developed for the walk featuring a cleared communal area with low wooden platforms, sitting logs, a composting toilet with water tank, separate tent sites and information panels. Banksias abound, though in August most are still sporting last year's flowers.

zoologists, whereas we instantly recognise the work of ants in peppered sand mounds elsewhere. These sights remind me of the grim sandmining battle waged over the preservation of Cooloola, which boasts the world's greatest diversity and number of ant species at more than 280.

Needles cushion our steps as we descend into the cool of sheoaks amid more sand pits built by antlion larvae to trap hapless ants for dinner.

It's as if the forest comes to life when we settle
in, swaying and groaning in the wind

A forest giant watches over walkers



The view from Noosa River campsite



Birding paradise

Following the inland side of the main north-to-south dune the track continues through brilliant green wattles interspersed with rainforest, the rustle of chocolate-brown leaves underfoot competing with the surging surf.

Lunch beside the impressive Cooloola Sandpatch is a refreshing treat. I imagine the wind and rain scouring out this desert-like expanse as I scan the surface for fulgurites—the glassy tubes of sand cemented by lightning strike, charcoal, abraded tree trunk remains and fluted iron-stained sand.

Exposed worked flakes and cores point to an indigenous Cooloola culture, as do trunks bearing canoe-, coolamon- and shield-shaped scars later. Some scars are only evident in stump cross-sections, as arc-shaped gaps reveal how they have healed from the outside and become occluded.

We leave the sandpatch as sunset rays highlight it against the backdrop of lakes and mountains and descend the well-trudged six-kilometre track to the river, passing several schoolchildren on the way. This is the most popular part of the walk and often used by canoeists.

Our track turns north as we near the river and darkness falls. A short diversion

We take turns cooling off in the fresh water before dinner, and just as the last of the group sheds his clothes the helicopter returns with a spotlight to illuminate proceedings.

brings us to Noosa River campsite 4, which though separate from the official Great Walk sites must still be prebooked.

We take turns cooling off in the fresh water before dinner, and just as the last of the group sheds his clothes the helicopter returns with a spotlight to illuminate proceedings. We're only just getting over our hysterical laughter, and Frank his paranoia, when a ball of grey fur bounces into our circle. After exclamations that the visitor isn't vermin but in fact an endemic melomys, we watch the fuzzy sphere continue its search for unguarded morsels.

To work off a one-pot masterpiece, some of us take a nightwalk to the next campsite looking and listening out for sugar gliders and fruit bats.

DAY 3: NOOSA RIVER TO DUTGEE CAMP (2KM)

Our intended day of rest becomes known

as 'wallumful day', after a 7am photocall for the flawless river reflections. Atypically, the Noosa River flows parallel to the coast, its forested and reedy banks occasionally breaking into little white beaches behind the dunes. Its tea-tree colouring derives from the slow decomposition of the plants that fall or are washed into its sluggish flow, while the largely pristine vegetation has preserved the river's diverse beauty. The acidic sandy soils of the wallum ecosystem, which takes its name from the Kabi tribal name for *Banksia acmula*, support a rich diversity of flowering plants including many that depend on fire for germination.

After recovering some equipment we didn't know we'd lost on various photographic wanders, we start wending our way northward in mottled sunlight along the level sandy track, crossing two of the walk's seven bridges en route.

On one of the log bridges we catch the distinct whiff of fruit bats while robins, fantails, drongos, honeyeaters, wood swallows, wrens, cockatoos and wattledbirds do their best to catch our attention. Fissured eucalypts blackened by fire contrast with the spikes of golden flowers, and we take time to appreciate the detailed design of pink, mauve and rose-coloured boronias with binoculars. The central design of translucent vertical anthers looks to me like a cross between a Barbie tiara and some boxed wreath from middle earth, each one topped with an inverted heart-shaped tongue and dotted with golden pollen. Our next campsite, an old timber industry landing, adopted the local indigenous word for these flowers: Dutgee.

After finishing the last of our wine, we ignore the third evening's helicopter intrusion and concentrate on the antics of four brazen melomys.

DAY 4: DUTGEE TO LITORIA CAMP (14.8KM)

By the fourth morning we're in no doubt about the enthusiasm of Cooloola's dawn chorus, but we immediately christen the day the 'day of birds'. I'm not surprised to learn later that Cooloola sponsors more than 350 bird species, almost half the national count.

Our avian companions ramp up the volume as we cross the wallum and climb into big timber country. As the cavernous-like blackbutt forest envelops so does the static-like din, the canopy alive with the acrobatics of restless flycatchers, spinebills and red-headed honeyeaters.

For morning tea I spreadeagle on wide sandy track dented with holes we assume were made by searching bandicoots. The whip-crack calls of eastern whibirds pierce through the general chatter as we pass the derelict ruins of Ramsays Hut and colossal blackened trunks. It's all a far cry from the eucalyptus honey-perfumed and flower-strewn track we experienced earlier. Descending through a young, lurid green wattle grove to banksia trees and past the occasional cycad I stop occasionally to admire the purple flowers of the false sarsaparilla and hovea bush.

We break for lunch beside a swamp of reeds and paperbarks but there's no break in the avian serenade until around 3pm. An hour later we reach Litoria campsite, named after the sedgefrogs adapted to Cooloola's mildly acidic lakes, on a dry ridge above a very reedy Lake Cooloomera.

DAY 5: LITORIA TO KAURI CAMP (20.5KM)

On day five we walk north into tall forest to the crunch of bark and sticks underfoot. Huge felled trunks, some cut, some fallen, lay heavily on a soft mat of sheoak needles like limless soldiers in a Monty Python sketch. Covering some of the highest sections of the sandmass, the track leads us into the presence of living giants such as the straight-trunked kauri pine. The littoral rainforest is dense with palms and strangler figs, shutting out the breeze.

We arrive at the majestic Kauri campsite at dusk to the wail of a catbird. A yellow robin helps clear the area of insects and it's as if the forest comes to life when we settle in, swaying and groaning in the wind. We agree it has been the 'day of forest giants'.

DAY 6: KAURI TO CARLO CARPARK (15.2KM)

The track undulates for our walk out. The drier, more open, north-facing slopes support tea trees whereas the more moist and densely vegetated south-facing ones favour sheoak. Fine ferns line the route, contrasting with blueberry ash, overarching fronds, great loops of vine and more menacing stranglers that embrace host gums with guy rope-like extensions, taut as harp strings. Our ascent to Lake Poona, the region's largest perched lake, is only intruded on by the thud of our poles and the flapping of brown and gold butterflies.

Then we enter wetter, glossy-leaved forest in which mistletoe flowers, tangerine palm frond bases and macramé-like piccabreen palm fruiting bodies decorate the ground.

A litter of circumcised gum nut-like bases and their ring-like trimmings catch my attention. We wonder if the nuts were cut open while still green by native bees in search of resin the right consistency for hive building, but local entomologists remain uncertain about the identity of the 'cutter'. As a result, we name the last day the 'day of the cut nuts'.

After lunch we sidetrack to a lookout to take in Double Island Point and the northernmost surf break on the east coast. Friarbirds greet us as we cross the Carlo Sandblow to the scribbly gums of Rainbow Beach and the news that we should have been told the Cooloola Great Walk was closed for burning off. **W**

Brisbane-based Rae Sheridan is a retired museum education officer and last year's winner of the Queensland Natural History Award. She recently co-authored a book about the impact of climate change on cultural heritage. raesh Sheridan.cgpublsher.com



The Enn-th D E G R E E

Enn Truupold has been rock climbing and exploring wild places for 70 years. Here, *Bruce Cameron* charts his vertical adventures

I first saw the name Enn Truupold in a rock climbing guidebook in the 1970s. Growing up on the edge of the Blue Mountains National Park at Glenbrook provided quick access to the big sandstone cliffs above Glenbrook Gorge and the climbs that threaded their way up its cracks and corners. One such climb, and the first recorded rock climb in Glenbrook Gorge, was named Orion and was lead by Enn Truupold in 1952. I often wondered who the man behind the name was. Along with a small group of local climbers, I continued to climb in the gorge in the late 1970s and 80s, filling in the gaps by climbing the walls, arêtes and harder lines that the original pioneer climbers had not ascended many years before. Enn remained a mystery—a man, I thought, from a forgotten era.

Fast forward to about 10 years ago. I was walking out to Lockleys Pylon above the Grose Valley with Sydney climber Hayden Brotchie to attempt a new route when Hayden dropped the name Enn Truupold. I was amazed to hear Enn was still climbing and had just repeated an ascent of a climb up Mount Banks (aka Mount King George) that he had completed in 1953 with the legendary team of Russell Kippax, Dave Rootes and Owen Lewellyn. The team had knocked off the biggest line in the Blue Mountains, complete with an alpine-style bivvy cave en route. Their trusty sandals proved to be the answer on the acres of black rock that rise to the

summit. The team left a note in the cave to record their ascent.

Hayden and I discussed the team's adventures and I was fascinated to learn that Enn still rockclimbed regularly and visited the indoor climbing gym up to three times a week. As we finished our new route in the driving wind and snow

mature climbers dubbed the 'Crocs on the Rocks' were still meeting regularly to climb and socialise. Crocs member Les Tattlesell assured me: "Enn is an amazing person with a very interesting and colourful climbing story."

I found out he first started climbing in Lancashire in the UK, when climbing was

pure and primitive. Only natural anchors like small trees, chockstones and other features were used for protection. It was the era of British climbing purism. Using hemp ropes and a bowline loop tied around the middle of the leader, a lead fall had dire consequences. Falling without a harness was both painful and risky. When I finally, eagerly, talk with the man himself I ask about this time.

He says: "A leader's fall was unthinkable, extremely rare and usually disastrous." When nylon rope started to appear in the early 1950s, it "improved things slightly". Climbing footwear then generally resembled mountaineering boots, featuring leather soles fixed with either clinker or Tricouni nails, while plimsolls came in handy for more technical climbs. Enn explains: "Beginners had to start in nailed boots in order to learn proper footwear."

In those early days, Enn particularly enjoyed climbing in the Lake District, north Wales and the Isle of Skye but also sampled local grit-stone outcrops and a couple of sandstone crags. In winter, he would take to the icy roads of the Lake District on a motorbike with gear piled on the petrol tank and the pillion passenger carrying a big rucksack.

When he arrived in Australia in 1952



flurries typical of mid-winter climbing in the Blue Mountains, I thought what a great story the decades of climbing history Enn has been part of must be.

The years rolled on but recently I was contacted by one of Enn's old mates from the early days of hemp rope and shoulder belays. After 50 years or more of tying on a rope together, an unofficial group of



Enn leading on the Original Route in 1952



On Perpendicular Point near Nowra recently



On Second Thoughts, Mount York, in 2011

the Sydney Rock Climbing Club (SRC) had only recently been formed. He describes his first outing on the Blue Mountains' iconic Three Sisters as "a rather scary experience", fearing that the alien rock was less reliable than what he was used to. As the team ascended the rock towers of the Sisters shrouded in mist, the huge distance to the swirling valley floor accentuated just how exposed their primitive equipment left them. As darkness loomed, the party became disoriented on the unfamiliar east face before experienced climber Russell Kippax guided them off.

It was not long before those early Blue Mountains climbers traded in their heavy boots for lightweight sandshoes.

In addition to tackling the limestone walls of Bungonia Gorge and the volcanic towers of the Warrumbungles, Enn notched up new routes in the Capertee and Wolgan valleys and Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park. Many of these were completed following the natural line, went unrecorded, and were most likely claimed as first ascents and new routes by others much later.

Enn has many fond memories of his part in the first major ascent of Mount Banks in 1953. The south-west face, now affectionately referred to as the Original Route, was first attempted in 1951 by Kippax. He made it to the major ledge, about a third of the way up the 350-metre face. On the second attempt in 1952, which Enn was a part of, the team was forced back due to a lack of belay anchors at the start of a very exposed pitch after the bivvy cave. The following January, they returned and improvised the never-to-be-

replicated 'double bum belay' to get past the crux of the climb.

Enn explains: "The only anchor available to Russell's belayer was a dubious thin cord threaded through a small hole in the rock, so myself and Dave Roots attempted to provide extra security by connecting ourselves to the second climber by tightly held ropes and jamming our backsides as hard as we could into the shallow cave."

He completed a second ascent together with Dave Roots and Les Tattersall the same year, and ensured the cave could be used as a comfortable bivvy site in 1954. Enn made a further three visits to Mount Banks over the next decade. In later notes on the route, legendary Australian climber John Ewbank described it as "bold, exciting and a true mountain experience".

In the 1970s and 80s, between long bushwalks in the southern Blue Mountains and cross-country skiing trips in the high country, Enn became the Australasian senior champion in orienteering.

In 2005, 52 years after the first ascent, Enn returned to Mount Banks with SRC members Hayden Brothie, Rod Smith and Jim Dickens. Rather than repeat the Original Route though, the team followed a slightly different one to the first ascent line known as the Warwick Williams Variant (after another early SRC member). They found two belay bolts installed where two bums had sufficed in 1953.

In recent years, Enn has stuck to long, easy climbs such as Margarine Ridge in the Grose Valley and Sweet Dreams near Leura, as well as the sea cliffs at Point Perpendicular near Nowra and classic routes on Mount Arapiles.

This June, he will celebrate his 86th birthday as one Australia's oldest active climbers. He has been suffering from breathing difficulties and arthritis in his knees of late, but remains a regular visitor to the local climbing gym and gets outdoors as much as he can. Enn believes that sticking with his climbing, against the advice of doctors, has actually helped his knees recover.

When asked about the state of climbing today, he says: "Generally, due to improved equipment, climbing now is much safer than it was in my young days, but one slightly questionable development is the use of bolts. I believe bolting should be avoided where safety can be obtained by use of natural protection, and where bolts are used, they should not stand out like graffiti and spoil the appearance of the natural rock."

To novices, he strongly recommends joining a recognised climbing club and training with a commercial guide or highly experienced climber before swapping the gym for outdoors.

Most Australians nearing 90 would find it hard to imagine themselves abseiling over and then climbing up a cliff face, but that's just an average Sunday for Enn Truopold. For him, climbing is a continuous and adventurous journey of pure rock, beautiful locations and fun with friends. **W**

Bruce Cameron lives and climbs in the Blue Mountains, and contributed regularly to *Rock* between 1995 and its closure in 2013. The second edition of his book *A History of the Blue Labyrinth* will be released later this year.

9 wilderness

River explorer and wilderness filmmaker *Kevin Casey* looks at the good, the not so good, and the utterly useless advice found in modern survival manuals

survival myths

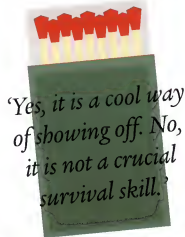
I have had the pleasure of exploring some of the wildest and most pristine river systems on Earth, often alone and with minimal equipment, for three decades. I've shared antelope stew with pygmies in Gabon, paddled solo through a 13,000-square-kilometre swamp in Argentina, discovered unknown waterfalls in the northern Kimberley, tracked jaguars in Guyana and dodged flash floods in British Columbia. Over the years I have read countless survival manuals, and even wrote one myself in 2000 entitled *Australian Bush Survival Skills*. What my experience has taught me is that much of what is published is simply rebashed from other sources without being tested, and is unrealistic in a genuine outdoor emergency. While books certainly have their place, I believe exploring with a skilled indigenous companion is by far the best way to learn the skills you need for a specific area. Here, I present some of the ideas regularly trotted out as survival gospel that don't necessarily cut it in the real world:



1. RUB TWO STICKS TOGETHER TO MAKE FIRE

This outdoor party trick comes in many forms: the bow drill, the hand drill, the fire plough, the bamboo version. But it begs the question, if a person is prepared enough to practise these techniques to the point of expertise, wouldn't they also have a couple of plastic lighters, a flint or some waterproof matches in a plastic bag in their pocket? If you have never made fire by rubbing bits of wood together, I can pretty much guarantee you will not be able to perform this difficult and labour-intensive task in a real survival situation. You need the right type of bone-dry wood and all

sorts of practise to do this consistently. Yes, it is a wonderful way to teach survival students about patience and stubborn persistence. Yes, it is a cool way of showing off. No, it is not a crucial survival skill.



2. FOLLOW A RIVER DOWNSTREAM TO CIVILISATION

I have conducted over a dozen solo expeditions in the Kimberley region and virtually all the rivers and creeks here flow from rocky gorge country and open savanna down to mangrove coastline. Here, the boat traffic is practically nonexistent while the dangers include crocodiles, deadly jellyfish, prowling whaler sharks and a distinct lack of fresh drinking water. If it is civilisation or rescue you're after, heading downstream is not always the way to go.

3. IMPROVISE A COMPASS WITH A NEEDLE, LEAF & BOWL OF WATER
The idea is simple: magnetise a needle with a piece of silk (everyone carries a



silk hanky in their expedition pack, right?), then place it carefully atop a leaf floating in a container of water, and it will swing to point north. But how can you know how magnetised your needle has become, if at all? Is that not a tiny gust of undetectable wind pointing you in the wrong direction? I say leave this unreliable flummery to those who would trust their lives to a needle and a leaf, and instead wear your compass around your neck from dawn until you crawl into your tent, and always carry a spare. Trust your compass, as 999 times out of a 1,000 it knows the correct direction better than you do.

4. DIG A SOLAR STILL IN THE DESERT TO COLLECT FRESH WATER

Dig a hole in the soft sand (the soil is never hard or rocky in survival books), place some moist vegetation in the hole, add a cup, cover the whole production with a clear plastic sheet, place a rock weight in the centre of the sheet, leave it in the sun, and check back at night for your drink. A former combat survival instructor for the Australian Defence Force, who has dug thousands of solar stills in various

'How can you know how magnetised your needle has become, if at all?'





Australian environments to test their efficiency, has confirmed to me that a solar still yields an average of 200 millilitres of water after a full day in the sun. This relies on you finding an ideal spot for the still and constructing it properly with close attention to the angle of the plastic under which the water droplets must travel. So is the sweat you expend in the construction worth the measly quantity of water you collect? In my view, desert stills are only practical for the purpose of distilling dirty water into safe drinking water. If you want to extract water from the landscape in dry environments, the best device is a clear plastic bag about two metres long, a metre wide and thick enough to resist punctures (50 microns works well). This can cover a leafy plant branch or whole sapling entirely and be tied off at the open end to trap the moisture released by the plant. The yield from this is much higher than a desert still, and the labour involved much less. I recommend hikers on arid expeditions carry two of three of these bags, which you can purchase from survival websites, and leave them tied on a plant from morning to nightfall.

5. WILD ANIMALS ARE A BIG DANGER

Statistically, wild animals pose almost no threat to wilderness travellers when compared to sprained wrists, foot blisters, campfire burns, twisted knees and careless

KEVIN'S TOP 5 TIPS

- Always carry a 10-centimetre-wide crepe roller bandage in an easily accessible pocket. You can wrap it around a swollen ankle or use it to support a dodgy knee, and if you are bitten by a snake it becomes the most crucial item in your pack.
- If you're heading out into wet and windy conditions, consider carrying a ziplock bag of cotton balls smeared with petroleum jelly for tinder.
- Always carry a signal mirror and learn how best to create a visible circle or

knife cuts. And of all the denizens of the natural world, it is the little ones that are most likely to harm you; the humble mosquito remains the most dangerous creature on Earth.



6. NEVER GO INTO THE WILDS ALONE

I certainly don't recommend novice bushwalkers rush off on a solo trek through Yemen, but in 30 years of exploring isolated rivers solitude has never been a negative for me. Going alone is quieter, faster and simpler. You see more wildlife because the sounds of conversation, pounding boots and communal noise are reduced. Learning tracking and bow-and-arrow fishing from indigenous tribesmen has been a great privilege, but when I have the option I still prefer a solo journey.

7. BOIL WATER FOR 8 MINUTES

Boiling is a simple and effective option for killing cryptosporidium, tapeworm cysts, giardia and other nasties in your water, but the advice in survival books ranges from three minutes to more than 10. The truth is once you have brought water to a rolling boil, it's boiled. It doesn't require extra boiling 'just to make sure'.

arrow pattern with things like rocks, branches or clothes. Once you hear a rescue aircraft you may have no more than three minutes before it flies directly over your position.

- If you get lost it is vital to conserve your body's existing calories and moisture by staying put in a prominent location.
- Digital gadgets make a nice addition to existing gear but are a shaky substitute for experience and an honest appraisal of your limitations.

8. DRINK YOUR OWN URINE TO SURVIVE IN THE DESERT

Human urine has some uses in a survival scenario. A dark, yellow colour warns you you're getting close to serious dehydration. You can also soak a spare t-shirt in it to wrap around your head for evaporative cooling. But urine as a beverage is not a good idea. In arid conditions your body is already struggling with hydration so the last thing it needs is additional toxins.

9. CARRY A BIG KNIFE

When I lived in Alaska, I met a fellow who owned a high-calibre rifle specifically designed for killing elephants. He said he just liked the idea of having the biggest gun around. On most survival television shows the hero wears a deadly looking knife on his belt that rarely gets used. My knife of choice has always been a folding, serrated knife with a three-inch blade that locks in place. The only reason a machete or similar might be necessary is if building a wooden shelter or skinning animals.



California-born river explorer Kevin Casey migrated to Australia in 1991. His account of trekking 400 kilometres in the Drysdale River area of the Kimberley appeared in *Wild* issue 18 and he began filming his adventures in 2004. remotetriverman.com

'Human urine has some uses in a survival scenario. But urine as a beverage is not a good idea.'

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Beginner's guide to getting fit for trekking

Trekking fitness trainer *Chase Tucker* describes his top five exercises for trekkers and mountaineers

You might be a marathon runner or able to leg press more than 200 kilos but that doesn't mean you're going to find trekking uphill with a backpack for seven hours a day a cinch. Trekkers need great multi-joint strength and muscular endurance, and while challenging bushwalks are the best way to build this, there are a number of other things you can do through the week to speed up your preparation and ensure you stay pain-free.

All the strength training in the world will go to waste on the mountain if you haven't first developed stability and bilateral strength. Once you have

maximised your quality of movement, you can start working on building serious endurance and, of course, mental strength.

Here are some of the most effective exercises in my experience:

A. SUSPENSION PISTOL SQUAT

Most fitness instructors nowadays use a suspension training system to help people build strength and stability. Grab the handles with one or both hands and lean back on one straight leg, the other straight out in front in a horizontal position. Bend the knee of the vertical leg, and slowly lower yourself until your butt hits your

calf muscle, ensuring your heel stays firm on the ground. Tighten your core, exhale and push up from the heel to a standing position, using your arms if need be. Start off with three to five reps and focus on your form, keeping an upright, neutral spine, then gradually increase the rep range up to 20. If you do two to three sets regularly you'll see quick improvements in leg strength, not to mention balance.

B. SUSPENSION MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

I use this aptly named core/cardio hybrid exercise in a few ways. Done quickly, it's great for getting the heart rate up in



Exercise photos featuring
Chase Tucker by Dave Ryan

interval training sessions, which builds stamina. Done at a snail's pace, it strengthens the hip flexor, which takes some of the working load off your quadriceps on the uphill so that you fatigue at a lower rate. Begin with your feet hanging directly below the anchor, then drive up one knee at a time into your chest. If you stay strong through your core and glutes it'll prevent your hips from lowering down, and build bulletproof core strength.

C. BULGARIAN SPLIT SQUAT

After building a strong basis of bilateral strength using squat variations, the





Bulgarian split squat is your number-one weapon for boosting leg strength as it simultaneously trains your glutes, quads and hamstrings. Start in a deep lunge position and put your back foot up on a box or bench of knee height or lower. Lower your back knee to the ground repeatedly, staying balanced and strong through your core on the way up. Ensure your front knee doesn't extend past your toes. I've found that the quadriceps respond very well to high volume, so aiming for two to three sets of 10 to 20 reps on each leg is the goal.

D. DEAD BUG

It takes only five to six weeks to start building a solid foundation of core strength, particularly when you include functional, dynamic exercises in your program. The dead bug is perfect for this but it takes concentration, mental strength and control. As with all core exercises it's best done slowly, as the muscles are slow twitch. Maintaining straight, upright arms and legs is enough for beginners. For a

real challenge, lower your legs to the ground away from the mid-section of your body. Work on 30 to 90 seconds of this exercise without rest to build functional core strength with an endurance focus, ensuring you maintain a strong mid-section and neutral spine throughout.

Walking or running is obviously necessary, but if all you do is walk and run you're leaving a gap in your armour

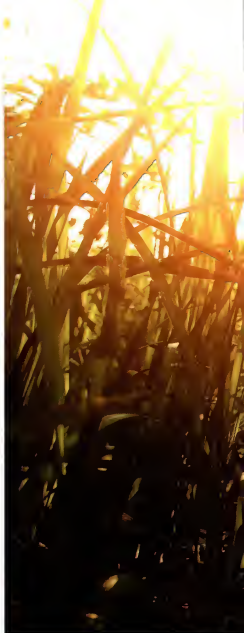
E. SINGLE LEG HIP THRUST

This is my go-to equipment-free exercise for building strong, functional strength in the glutes and hips. It's also great for hamstring development and preventing knee injuries. Begin by driving your heel into the ground and pushing the hips as high as possible inwards and upwards. Ensure your hips remain in line with your shoulders and

ribcage, rather than twisting towards the upright leg. Pause at the top briefly and then lower slowly until your glutes almost touch the ground. Repeat for two to three sets of 15 to 30 reps.

HOW OFTEN TO TRAIN?

If you're already very active I recommend starting your training three to four months out, doing five or six sessions a week. An average week might involve a moderate-paced walk on Monday, resistance training for the legs and core on Tuesday and Thursday, plus an interval session on stairs while wearing a pack on Thursday, then a long hike on Saturday on steep and uneven terrain to get your stability and confidence up. Set yourself the goal of hiking one or two kilometres further than the longest day on your planned trek, and remember: no one ever comes back from an expedition saying they trained too hard.





MOST COMMON MISTAKES?

Starting too late: I often get approached by people with four weeks to go before their trek, which simply isn't enough time to see physiological adaptations from any type of training. Adaptations in cardiovascular fitness can take six to eight weeks of regular training, and strength gains require even longer (eight to 12 weeks). Things like flexibility can take years.

Lack of variety: Lack of variety in your training is not only tedious, it can also leave you underprepared. Walking or running is obviously necessary, but if all you do is walk and run you're leaving a gap in your armour that will invite injury. This gap should be filled with strength training, stability work, stretching, interval training and core work. You can never do too much core.

Ignoring altitude: Altitude sickness can strike anyone at any time regardless of fitness, but this doesn't mean altitude training is a waste of time. By training in a simulated altitude environment or using a training mask, you can gain an understanding of how altitude can affect your body and particularly your mind. This could save your life in the mountains, or at least improve your mountain experience.

Ignoring gravity: Swimming is an excellent way to build total body strength and cardiovascular fitness, but its short-term effectiveness for the mountains is very limited as it doesn't place gravitational forces on the body. Both trekking and mountaineering are a battle against gravity, so your training must reflect this. If you have less than 12 weeks to prepare, you're better off cross training with yoga or pilates than swimming laps.

Not having a plan: A goal without a plan is just a dream. Get yourself a plan that takes a periodised sports science-based approach, feeding in recovery time as well as exercise to build your strength and stamina. It should be tailored to your specific trek and suit your lifestyle. After all, the best program for you is the one you actually stick to.

Putting up with muscle soreness: A lot of people skip the dynamic stretching part of their routine and end up being sore for longer. If you know what you're doing, self-myofascial release (or foam rolling) is a great way to reduce muscle soreness and joint stress. In the outdoors, I use a Nalgene one-litre bottle as a substitute for the roller. W

Chase Tucker is founder of Base Camp Adventure Fitness in Brisbane, which prepares hikers, climbers, mountaineers and skiers for their adventures through online, indoor and outdoor training. basecampfit.com



Delicious drops

Well-considered food drops offer the perfect opportunity for indulgence on a long walk, writes *Andrew Davison*

We were a week into the Australian Alps Walking Track, standing on Mount Skene and staring into the blue haze that permeated from the rolling forested landscape. Below us, stashed under the broad trunk of a gnarled snow gum and some alpine brush, was a barrel holding a cache of food. Placed there a month before, it was a crucial deposit of provisions designed to make the 655-kilometre traverse a comfortable one and carefully selected so as not to spoil in the varying weather.

As I opened the barrel I was pleased to spy a gluttonous portion of homemade fruitcake for afternoon tea, in addition to a few bottles of fine red and an evening's supply of complimenting aperitifs.

We stuffed ourselves with magret,


saucisson, pate and tapenades, among other appetisers. We nibbled on hard cheeses to cleanse the palate between wines and produced a tasty meal of frittata with beetroot and carrot salad. A preplanned food drop gives you the ability to enjoy moments such as these on extended walks, as well as allowing you to carry a lighter pack.

The container you place your food in is of course one of the most important things to consider as it not only needs to be strong enough to withstand rain and sun but also keep out curious animals. I often use small, watertight, plastic barrels. This generally requires me to travel at great lengths to recollect them afterwards, but I tend to make a weekend of it and get another walk in.

Lighter alternatives that can be carried straight out include large coffee or Milo tins. These can easily be sourced from commercial kitchens, fit a few days worth of food for one person and can be flattened under the lid of your pack.

It is prudent to write on each container what it contains and the date you expect to collect it; a note that may well appease the curiosity of unscrupulous characters should they uncover it.

Once the container is sealed and labelled, place it in a well-shaded area or under a small rock overhang to try and keep the temperature at a constant so as to preserve the food. Obviously avoid placing in the prominent flood area of a stream or where a deep snowdrift might form.



I also like to put my food drops at a pleasant camp spot, so I can enjoy the heavy specialties I have stashed without having to lug them far. This location does not need water as you can leave litres of water at your food drop; our camp on the summit of Mount Skene was certainly a highlight of the AAWT.

It is possible to introduce some variety into your diet on a long-distance walk while maintaining a lightweight pack. If you like the commercial glass jars of olives or pesto, for instance, you can simply pack an additional plastic container into the food drop to transfer the contents into when you arrive and return for the heavy jars later.

Fresh herbs such as basil and mint leaves will last weeks if packed in small containers of oil and make a delicious addition to salads or crackers with cheese. Good saucisson does not require refrigeration and can simply be wrapped in a light cloth, while waxed and hard cheeses such as Parmesan will last surprisingly long. Coating fresh eggs in wax or lard will also help them keep for weeks in your container, but it's best to substitute butter for olive oil as the former quickly turns rancid in the heat. Remember you should always store fuel separately as a spill could ruin your food.

The following two dishes are designed for enjoying at the food drop site.

ANCHOVY, PARMESAN & BASIL FRITTATA

If you're prepared to carry fresh eggs on the first few days of your trip this meal is not restricted to food drops. This frittata is cooked using the double boiler method, which requires you to have a set of loosely nesting pots.

Serves 2

1 diced onion
 ½ cup of canned diced tomatoes
 2 dessert spoons of torn basil leaves in oil
 ¼ cup of loosely packed chopped parsley in oil
 1 x 45g tin of anchovy fillets
 ¼ cup of grated Parmesan
 ½ cup of self-raising flour
 3 eggs
 ½ cup of UHT cream (or 3 dessert spoons of full cream milk powder with ½ cup of water)
 Cracked pepper to taste

IN THE FIELD

Open the tin of anchovies and drain the oil into a fry pan on the heat, then add the diced onion and sauté until soft and translucent. Just before you remove the onion from the heat add the anchovies, breaking them up as they fry. Remove from heat and let cool. Break the eggs into the

smaller of the two pots you are carrying and beat together with tomatoes, cream, the drained basil and parsley, pepper and cheese. When the onion mix has cooled a little, add this and the flour to the egg bowl too. Pour a small amount of water into the largest pot you have and place your smaller pot of frittata batter inside. Place on heat, cover well and let boil, adding more water to the larger pot periodically if necessary. The frittata will take approximately 30 minutes to cook, so be sure to have adequate fuel.

BEEETROOT & CARROT SALAD

Serves 2

1 medium beetroot
 1 carrot
 1 bunch of chopped parsley in oil
 1 orange
 Cracked pepper to taste

IN THE FIELD

Grate the beetroot and carrot. Carefully remove the zest of half the orange (leaving the bitter white pith behind), finely chop it and add to the beetroot and carrot. Squeeze in the juice of the orange and add the drained parsley, mix and serve.

Lerderderg State Park

Ricky French checks out short and multi-day walks in Lerderderg State Park near Melbourne



Lerderderg River looking upstream from near Mackenzie's Flat

Photos: Ricky French

Just a short trip north-west of Melbourne lies a large, and largely unnoticed, area of rugged grandeur: Lerderderg State Park. The park packs a lot in (more than repetitive vowel sounds). Bushwalkers will discover both easy and challenging routes, the centrepiece being a wild river bash 32 kilometres down the Lerderderg river and gorge. The gorge spent some time as a glacier 280 million years ago and the sandstone cliffs rising from the river are still mountainous, spectacular and dominating. The main two- to three-day hike along the river is a valuable introduction to untracked river travel, and will sharpen your skills as well as test your ankles. Frogs and birds provide step-by-step

audio commentary, mountain goats goof off and fleets of dragonflies dart above the rocks. Stringybark, ironbark and over 300 native plant species provide life and colour. The secluded town of Blackwood offers a good introduction to the area and features a fine campground alongside the river. The area was once thriving with miners who, from the 1850s onwards, came in their thousands to sluice for gold along the river. The names of many tracks are descended from these miners, and other tracks bear more celebratory names: Whisky Track, Run Track, Champagne Gully. The miners' pioneering quest for riches seemingly led to trouble too, giving us Break Neck Gully,

Dead Man's Gully and Dead Horse Gully. Water races are cut into the hills and old mines and stone walls litter the landscape, choked by the overgrowth.

The park has the feel of a party after everyone has left, with the walks taking you through Australian history, both geological and recent. Around the O'Briens Crossing region you can date relics not only by rust but also by the era of Victoria Bitter cans. It's an area thoroughly explored and used, many times burnt out by fire, storm-swept, logged, and struggling with introduced weeds and trail bikes, but at its heart is a stately and ancient patch of land, ready for you to step boldly inside.

WHEN TO GO

Any time of the year, though the warmer months allow swimming in many excellent spots. Check river levels after heavy rain as Lerderderg River can flood.

ACCESS

O'Briens Crossing is approximately 95 kilometres by road from Melbourne's CBD. Take the Western Highway to the C318 turnoff between Bacchus Marsh

and Ballan and head north through Greendale towards Blackwood. Look out for the Lerderderg State Park sign after Mount Blackwood Road and take the dirt road six kilometres down to O'Briens Crossing (Google Maps doesn't seem to recognise this road). The alternative, involving much more time on the slow dirt road, is to approach from the Calder Freeway and Gisborne via the Carrolls Lane turnoff.

ACCOMMODATION

Camping is plentiful along the tracks, and there are good facilities at O'Briens Crossing and Blackwood for walks starting there (camping is not allowed at Mackenzie's Flat). Be aware that O'Briens Crossing is prone to 4WD campers, trail bikers, loud music and other intrusions on serenity. You are advised to treat the river water with purification tablets prior to drinking.



Keep an eye out for snakes

FLORA & FAUNA

Large bushfires in 1983 mean much of the park is regenerating. It is a mix of eucalypt, small shrubs, gorse and other prickly weeds, areas of mat rush by the river and storm-damaged trees. Flowers such as fringe lilies, blue pin cushion, everlasting daisies, violets and dianella burst through the riverbed chaos. Birdlife is everywhere you look, as well as mosquitoes and dragonflies, which act as tour guides down the river boulders. It's also home to frogs, eels, ducks, all variety of ants, wombats, swamp wallabies, mountain goats, snakes and the spectacular spittfire caterpillar that can claim responsibility for some of the stinging your arms and legs will experience while pushing through the gums and grass.

MAPS

Coverage is provided by Vicmaps' 1:100,000 sheets for Bacchus Marsh (7722-N) and Trentham (7723-S) and Meridian Maps' *Lerderderg and Werribee Gorges*. The Vicmaps are easier to follow for those used to standard topographical maps, despite the larger scale, but feature errors in the location of tracks. The more accurate Meridian map is specific to the park and has a lot more information (including the location of the emergency markers) so take both if possible.

Lerderderg Gorge River Walk (32km, 14-16hrs)

Start: O'Briens Crossing
Finish: Mackenzies Flat

This is the longest, most isolated and most challenging of the walks in the park. The majority follows the river as it cuts through rugged Lerderderg Gorge. The walk can be done in two long days

but it's best to do it over three days to properly soak up the wilderness, and soak in the river. If heading from north to south, which is advised due to the advantages of following the river downstream, you'll need to either arrange a pick-up at Mackenzies Flat or drop a car off there and drive back to O'Briens Crossing.

DAY 1: O'Briens Crossing to campsites near Lower Chadwick & McKenzie Tracks (4-5 hrs)

From O'Briens Crossing follow the East Track. The track stays on the true left and takes you through regenerating bush and shrubs, with many fallen trees and flood debris to clamber over. Given the uneven going, it's difficult to gather any sort of rhythm to your walk, but the twisting nature of river travel means new views are revealed at every turn. Mining relics pop up on the journey and the river is never far. Enjoy the luxury of a track, as it won't last long.

The first good camping spot, Mine Camp,

to the river to join up with the Razorback North Track. Head east to save time, picking through the sparse trees, then clamber or slide down the steep hill to the river. From this point the river is your track and guide, and a very reliable one at that. Cross to the true right and get acquainted with the messy (but not particularly nasty) riverside pad. Following your progress with the map is recommended, to indicate exactly where you are in case of an emergency. Without the map it is a disorienting picture, albeit a very pretty one.

Water level will dictate much of the route, but generally the best progress is on the pads, only entering the river to make (numerous) crossings. It helps to stay on the inside bank as the river turns. Having good boots, resilient ankles, good core strength and balance will help, as you'll be hauling yourself over a veritable smorgasbord of natural obstacles. The travel is a mixture of open areas of stones alongside the riverbed, wading,



Most day-walks in the park are suitable for keen kids

is located about 15 minutes after the turn-off to the Nolan Track (LER522) down on a bench to the right of the track, complete with inviting swimming hole, pre-burnt fire pits and relics of ancient frying pans and baked bean cans. Continue along the track as it leaves the river and gently climbs to the intersection with the Cowan Track and about 10 minutes later the Spanish Onion Track. Enjoy what modest views you get through the trees at this spot; at around 100 metres above the river it's the highest point you'll attain on the hike. From here the track leads south-west back down

boulder hopping, long-grass bashing and negotiating fallen trees and other flood mayhem. Despite the slightly chaotic conditions, the route never presents any serious problems; there's no need to side bank or leave the river. During this first section the river passes several sidetracks, leading off steep spurs to both sides. The tracks are usually visible from the river and provide escape routes in an emergency. They're also helpful in confirming your location on the map as they're marked with the now-familiar green emergency markers. Also familiar by now are the stone walls



and crumbling mining diversions as you plod the course of long-gone sluicers. Sublime swimming holes feature regularly, often chiselled into a vertical cliff of neatly layered slate. Two first-night campsites are located after about two hours of river travel. The first is near marker LERS16 and the Lower Chadwick Track, which drops down from Mount Blackwood. Mining remnants (stone walls and terraces) have been shaped to form neat, flat, dirt campsites on valuable real estate on a ledge above the river. Crumbling cliffs encircle and snarl at the campsite, kicking sand into the perfectly cut-out swimming hole. If you desire extra space and grass then continue on for 15 minutes to the second campsite, where a considerable area of grassy, flat land is laid out at the foot of the McKenzie Track (LERS15). If the first campsite was your funky, inner-city apartment, then this is your quarter-acre country block. Its openness is a welcome novelty and the vegetation is spectacular and wild.

DAY 2: Campsite to Long Point (4–5hrs)

Continue downstream past more swimming holes and gaze up at increasingly serious walls of rock abutting the river. Pass the Ah Kow Mine ruins and the Ah Kow and Hogan Track. Keep an eye out for snakes sunning on the rocks. Follow the river as it twists obediently around hills. This is the heart of the gorge, and the hills rise 300 metres in some places. There are few decent camp spots until Long Point. No good could possibly come from attempting to scale the hills rising from the river so try to stay safe, as escape routes are few.

There are two good campsites near Long Point. The first sits peacefully above a calm swimming hole, nestled in a chicane in the river leading to Long Point. At this point the gorge opens up a bit and retreats, leaving much lower rock walls flanking the river. Long Point Diversion Weir squats dramatically around the next bend. Built in the 1970s, it diverts water from Lerderderg River through a tunnel in the hills to the Merrimu Reservoir, which provides water for the town of Bacchus Marsh and surrounding districts. It is certainly a striking thing to come across after two days on the lonely river. An enormous pool has been created at the Weir's upstream end, perhaps the ultimate swimming hole.

From the Weir there is a 4WD track that leads uphill away from the river, eventually joining back about three hours downstream, near the end of the trip.



On the East Track near O'Brien's Crossing



severe, so at some points it helps to wade through the middle of the river.

After nearly three hours of river travel you reach a foottrack (LER504). Cross to the true left and sidle a small rocky outcrop to reach the track and watch your progress fly. It's barely an hour and a half to Mackenzies Flat. The gorge becomes a valley and the hills drop away until it's little more than an amble amongst the daisies. Cross the heavy, symbolic stepping stones to Mackenzies Flat and cast off your pack as a proud, fully-qualified river-wrangler.

DAY WALKS



Most of the tracks stay close to the river and take in many interesting mining sites. The town of Blackwood especially has a plethora of walks, including the popular loop to Shaws Lake starting and finishing at the Blackwood Mineral Springs. The walks listed below are only a small selection.

O'Brien's Crossing-East Track -Cowan Track-O'Brien Road- O'Brien's Crossing (14km, 5hrs)

This is a good loop walk, combining river frontage and swimming holes with a tough climb through gum trees. From O'Brien's Crossing follow the East Track for two to three hours along Lerderderg River. There is quality exploring to be done of mining relics along the way. Rest stops by the river may yield sightings of eels, frogs and hoards of dragonflies. The turn-off for the Cowan Track is signposted and located at emergency marker LER520. Discard some layers here as the track climbs steeply up a ridge, before joining onto a 4WD track and then intersecting with O'Brien's Road on the east side of the river. Follow O'Brien's Road to Short Cut Track, which delivers you back to O'Brien's Crossing.

O'Brien's Crossing-Byres Back Track- The Tunnel-Lerderderg River- O'Brien's Crossing (5km, 2hrs)

This is a short loop walk, taking in great views of Lerderderg River and visiting the tunnel built by miners to divert its water. It also gives a good introduction to river travel. From O'Brien's Crossing follow the Byres Back Track as it climbs steeply up a spur behind the toilet block, staying close to O'Brien's Road. The track then turns and skirts the ridges, offering views down the valley. Take Gribbles Track, which leads steeply down to the river and the tunnel. Cross the river and climb over the tunnel entrance to the other side. This is top spot for a break and photos of the tunnel. A track leads back to O'Brien's Crossing from this point, but you may like to walk in the water and alongside the banks. You'll pass many old mining structures and the vegetation is dense and varied. There is a campsite located where Ambler Lane (a 4WD track) crosses the river.

Mackenzies Flat-Spur Track- Lerderderg Tunnel Access Track- Lerderderg River-Mackenzies Flat (17km, 7-8hrs)

This is a tough day walk at the southern end of the park, combining steep climbs and river travel. From Mackenzies Flat take the easy track upstream, past Grahams Dam to the Spur Track. The Spur Track climbs steeply and joins up to the Lerderderg Tunnel Access Track for 4WDs and drops down to the diversion tunnel at Lerderderg Weir. From the weir follow the river back to where it links up with the track, not far from Spur Track, and retrace the last easy section back to Mackenzies Flat. Another option from the weir is to climb the tough Long Point Track and turn on to Blackwood Ranges Track, then drop steeply down Link Track Number 1 back to Grahams Dam.

If you're river-weary you might like to take this option, otherwise stay loyal and stick it out in the wet. The other good campsite is not far past the Weir with plenty of flat grass, a small beach, wombat burrows and a swimming hole.

DAY 3: Campsite near Long Point to Mackenzies Flat (4-5hrs)

Keep on with the river pads through what is perhaps the toughest going of the trip. The undergrowth is taller, the small trees suddenly not so small and the storm debris

Solarmonkey Adventurer - \$159.95

This slimline, clamshell-style charger was the easiest to set up for optimum collection and we loved the hardy case with multiple connectors included. At 252g the unit itself is lighter than the Solio and, once juiced up over nine hours of direct sun, the integrated 2500mAh battery charged an iPhone 4 twice from almost flat. We were also impressed with how well the polycrystalline panels worked while hanging on a pack and the promised minimum operating temperature of -10C.

seatosummitdistribution.com.au

Switch 8 battery - \$49

We liked the level indicator LEDs on this 86g 2200mAh battery, and the fact you can swap in a flashlight tip. It charged fully in five hours via the Nomad 7 panel, giving one and a half iPhone 4 charges. goalzero.com.au

Bear Grylls SolarWrap Mini - \$99

We were very impressed with the efficiency of this ultralight panel (88g) with integrated 2200mAh battery, which needs to be staked down in the lightest of breezes. We'd prefer an attachment point at the battery end to limit how much it swings when hanging on a pack, but this had battery left after a full iPhone or point-and-shoot camera charge and fits easily in a trouser pocket.

bushnellaustralia.com.au

Solio Classic 2 - \$195

These beefy, petal-like collectors with integrated 3200mAh battery (weighing 287g) charged an iPhone 4 fully almost three times on Apple-optimised mode, but didn't seem to work as well as the Solarmonkey in slightly overcast conditions. We worried about scratching the top cell but liked being able to check battery level via the flashing LED, the pricetag and that power didn't drain when accidentally left on. zenimports.com.au

TRIED AND TESTED

Wild powers up with portable solar chargers

Guide 10 Plus Adventure Kit - \$149

The Nomad 7 monocrystalline (high-output) panels enabled us to charge up the Guide 10 battery pack (containing four rechargeable AAs, a flashlight and USB port) in four hours of direct sun or an iPhone directly in two. In lacklustre light, we had problems charging the phone directly but three hours in the same conditions gave the battery pack enough juice to charge the phone to 65%. We liked the integrated hanging loops and pocket, it's more compact than the Solarbook and can charge another device simultaneously via a cigarette lighter cord. goalzero.com.au

BioLite Campstove - \$229.95

Okay, this isn't a solar charger, but we've wanted to try the biomass stove that charges a USB device while you cook since 2012. The fan in the 933g unit helps get a healthy fire (and therefore charging ability) going quickly, but for the hassle of keeping it hot enough for seven minutes to create enough surplus power to boil a litre of water AND charge an iPhone 4 by 3%, we'd stick with a SolarWrap Mini and our Jetboil. If you just want a back-up energy source to make an emergency call, however, this is a satisfying investment. seatosummitdistribution.com.au

Solarbook 600 - \$269

...ing technology developed for the US army, the 120cm fold-out panel with sturdy case and 1 lithium-ion battery (weighing 662g) features individually wired collectors that work in less-than-perfect light and keep the device working if some are damaged. It only took about six hours to charge when draped over a tent in direct sun, we'd stick with the lighter Solio or a precharged watch 8 if keeping a smartphone powered was the aim. For basecamp adventures and topping up a tablet or SLR camera this is a reliable option, and can charge two USB devices at once, but it was a bit bulky when tucked into the back of a pack. bushnellaustralia.com.au

Owleye Generator - \$39.95

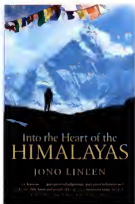
This 35g monocrystalline panel (advertised as 26g) designed to power the HighLux 3.0 bike light via micro-USB fixes securely to handlebars and collected enough energy in two hours for about three hours of constant light on medium intensity. A battery level indicator would be good but we liked the sleek design. bicyclepeddler.com.au



1. CAPE WOOLAMAI ROCKCLIMBING

By Holloway, S. & Brunkhorst, C. (osp.com.au, 2013, \$22.95)

Members of the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club spent two years compiling this glossy A5 guide to Victoria's Cape Woolamai and their passion for the long-neglected trad climbing venue shines through even when describing particular lines as awful or scrambles as a bit dicey. The wind, sea spray, unique horizontal breaks in the rock and mutton birds are all part of the adventure when climbing this pink granite cliff above the Bass Strait, where there are still ascent ascents such as Honour the Call to be claimed. Dedicated history sections and archive images pay homage to Australian climbers of the 1960s, including *Wild* founder Chris Baxter, while easy-to-digest notes on each of the 75 climbs overturn misconceptions that the entire area is characterised by loose rock and decaying belays. You cannot help but notice how many of the climbs were only established between 2007 and 2012, with a large section devoted to the Isla de Muerta seastack, and how great the scope is for exploration for climbers more interested in unworn lines than just notching up difficult routes. The general design of the guide is clean and the key simple, incorporating tide and afternoon sun symbols as well as walk-in times. Handy tips are also included on where to stock up for a weekend trip from Melbourne, what gear to use and treading lightly. The quality of the photography varies but chapter openers provide a strong sense of place and images like those on pages 35 and 58 are bound to inspire a visit to this dramatic stretch of coast.



2. INTO THE HEART OF THE HIMALAYAS

By Jono Lineen (Melbourne University Publishing, 2014, \$29.99)

This is not your standard adventure yarn. Many years and multiple drafts after he completed his epic solo trek across Pakistan, India and Nepal, Lineen brings us the very personal diary of a 2,700-kilometre spiritual quest to come to terms with the freak drowning of his younger brother. As landscapes, the faces of children and even shifts in the weather remind him of this great loss, he takes comfort from the 'clear world of walking' and tries to assimilate the wisdom of the numerous pilgrims he meets en route. These pilgrims range from monks and shamans to climbers searching for God on the peaks; they form the 'heart' of the title. Lineen is so often invited for tea or watched by wildlife that he rarely thinks of him as alone on the four-month journey. As a former professional cross-country skier we sense it would be more natural for him to focus on the physical achievement of becoming the first man to walk the western Himalaya alone, but he is far more interested in what 'the New India' means for the average family, what it is about a foreign forest that can make him feel at home, or the role of religious buildings in mountain culture. The book does feature plenty of moments of pure adventure, as the author dodges rockfalls and bus crashes and edgy soldiers, but none of these are as dramatic as his first stumbling step out of the shadows of his grief.

Directory

The Wild Directory is a comprehensive reference point for international outdoors-related businesses. You can list your firm for only \$48 an issue (\$58 in spot red).

For more information, contact Gayle Shapiro by email on gayle.shapiro@primecreative.com.au or telephone 03 9690 8766

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PUBLICATIONS

Rock back issues

Copies of the following back issues remain, priced at \$8.99 each: no 1 (pocket-sized reproduction with plastic cover) and all issues from no 21 onwards, many containing free bound-in RockGUIDES. For full contents and to order, phone us on 03 9690 8766.

Wild for sale

Wild issues 1-130 in 16 folders, ex. condition, no 1-50 indexed. Job lot \$150. Call John 0404 618 949.

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If you're planning on walking in any part of Australia, the chances are we've got the route covered. With over 200 walks described and illustrated with maps, *WildGUIDES* and *Track Notes* (from previous issues of *Wild*) provide

3. PROJECT WILD THING

Dir. David Bond & Ashley Jones (projectwildthing.com, 2013, \$12)

This UK-made documentary is both heartwrenching and laugh-out-loud funny as it charts the efforts of a father to reconnect his own children, and the rest of the country's, with nature. Appointing himself 'marketing director for nature', armed with a briefcase containing a felt model of a field scene, we cannot help but root for David Bond and as he meets with schoolchildren and branding gurus to try and 'sell' what he calls the ultimate 'wonder drug'. In line with what Richard Louv termed nature-deficit disorder, Bond has a simple message about the importance of inventive physical play in the outdoors but his film is never preachy. Nature does not have to mean national parks here, the smallest patch of grass counts. We chuckle at our own gullibility as much as at Bond when he dresses up as a squirrel around the Apple store to reinforce the power of advertising at keeping us indoors. If the middle class tinge to events ever makes the project (which has attracted hundreds of UK organisations and schools in support) seem self-righteous, footage of teenagers recoiling at the idea of getting their branded clothes dirty highlights its urgency. The juxtaposition of a boy on the remote Scottish island of Eigg happily munching on leaves in the woods and later transfixed by a game on the iPad prove that city dwellers are not the only ones fighting to give their children the experiences they will treasure most as an adult. If *Project Wild Thing* doesn't make you ban TV, you've not been watching closely.

4. WALKING WITH WARREN DURING ONE HALF LIFE

By Terry Krieg (imprints.com.au, 2013, \$39.95)

Rather than a linear narrative, this must-read book is a collection of remembered minutiae and often overlapping journeys in a 38-year friendship between two men with a profound appreciation of the South Australian landscape. Incorporating 2002's *Walking on Eyre* (about the duo's 1982 traverse of the great salty wilderness), Krieg expands his portrait of the late Warren Bonython as Australia's 'just plain bloody tough' desert adventurer through reprinted letters, photos and bushwalking diaries of great geological and logistical detail. We come to understand Bonython's military-style planning, desire to 'do things first' and taste for vintage reds first through the eyes of an awed apprentice, marvelling as the author struggles to keep up with a man 20 years his senior. Later, we see him emerging from the heat haze as the lone walker simply doing what he needs to feed his soul. While religious tones and chapters dedicated to climate change and the arts can jar, the stories of Krieg's campaign for a natural history centre in the Flinders Ranges and his work with student bushwalkers cannot fail to motivate the reader. Having accompanied Bonython on a third of his 3,300 kilometres of desert walking, Krieg gives us with the image of the man silently shouldering his pack, a trail of inspired teenagers behind.

essential instruction and information that no walker should be without. WildGUIDES are priced at \$8.20 each, individual Track Notes are \$5.99 each. Consult our online index at wild.com.au to establish your requirements and order online or phone in your order on 03 9690 8766.

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Blast from the PAST



THE CARTOONS THAT HAVE appeared in *Wild* over the years never fail to raise a smile. This one from our 20th anniversary issue appeared as part of a feature on 'feminine bushwalking' by Robyn Cooper. In the hilariously self-deprecating account of her first multi-day walk in Tasmania in the 1960s, Cooper explains she was 'prepared to make the compromise of wearing flatties, not heels' and is left stumbling in agony like Han Christian Anderson's little mermaid by her fashionable brogues. Cooper's companions are forced to take on the burden of her glass jars of face cream and her specially made denim suit-skirt never gets a wearing. The writer concludes that 'bushwalking and femininity were an ill-matched pair'.

WHOSE AD IS IT ANYWAY?

Answer in the next issue

Last issue:
Caribee backpacks



Author, ecologist and hero of high-country huts Klaus Hueneker reflects on his love affair with the Australian landscape

My parents loved fresh air, fresh food and fresh outdoor experiences. They first took me skiing in the Hartz Mountains in Germany when I was nine, then to Thredbo and ice-plastered Kosciuszko when we immigrated here in 1955. Each year we made the pilgrimage across the Blue Mountains from Orange to Garie or Palm Beach, and I remember climbing into the Kombi van on one of our last camping trips as a family, on the Myall River, because the old German tent leaked.

In 1966, after completing teachers college in Newcastle, I joined the National Parks Association of NSW and started an environmental degree at Macquarie University. I bought an H-frame pack, hobnailed boots, a japara tent and a not-especially-warm Klandra sleeping bag from Paddy Pallin's Liverpool Street shop. I joined Henry Fairley-Cunningham and John Murray of the NPA on walks across what is now Mimosa Rocks National Park and even on a bush bicycle ride to Jerrarderie on tyres meant for the velodrome.

On one memorable trip we hired a Kombi van to drive from Dead Horse Gap to the Barry Way via the Tin Mine huts and Nine Mile Pinch in Kosciuszko National Park, rebuilding parts of the track as we went. Stockmen or hydro workers were still in evidence at a couple of huts and there was ominous talk of bullets having flown across ranger vehicles.

While I was studying, Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* were released, but I was busy leading walks for the mountaineering club. On seven-day walks in the high country we'd overnight in huts, but I wasn't yet tuned into their heritage value. I remember going through 15 gates on the way home via Klandra, Rules Point and the Brindabella Valley, and posing behind a sign that read 'Shut gate, keep sheep on the block'.

The 60s was a frenetic and crucial time in the conservation movement. Lobbying for a National Parks and Wildlife Service—founded in 1967—reached its zenith.



I joined the ACE, the Coast and Mountain Walkers, Sydney Bushwalkers and the National Trust. I wrote letters to the editor, donated money, joined demonstrations and went on numerous field trips.

As part of my role on the NPA Reserves Committee I helped investigate areas like Comerong Island and the Beccroft Peninsula. The aim was to get 10 per cent of New South Wales into the reserve system, which it is now very close to.

In the Christmas holidays I worked as a seasonal ranger in Ku-ring-gai Chase National and for my honours project I investigated remaining bushland in the Sydney basin, which led to a job at the State Planning Authority. Following the guidelines of renowned landscape architect Ian McHarg, I created a series of transparent overlays for the Gosford-Wyong region that allowed you to identify the ideal land use for certain areas. That ideal then had to be bent to politics, vested interests and population pressures however, and I soon realised urban planning was a soul-destroying endeavour for an environmentalist.

I got a job as a research assistant in the Australian National University's forestry

department and investigated the ecology of bull oak (or *Casuarina stricta*) growing in the Canberra hills for my master's. I spent weekends walking or skiing, and fell in love with huts, homesteads and high-country history.

I've always been an obsessive note taker and when I realised very little was known about the huts I thought 'here's a canvas I might be able to fill'. When I tracked down the graziers who had built many of the huts to record their history, some didn't want to stop talking. Lindsay Willis's story of five stockmen, seven bushwalkers, and 17 dogs cramming into Mawsons Hut when snow hit one summer night in the early 1960s is one of many that have stayed with me. To be a fly on the wall then, watching people from different walks of life coming together, would have been something.

I was elected president of the Kosciuszko Huts Association in 1981 and published *Huts of the High Country* the following year. I think I was on the cusp of a national push to preserve our built history while the 'dark greenies' were trying to remove all structures. The book is now in its seventh printing after selling some 14,000 copies, and in 2012 I was chuffed to be made a Member of the Order of Australia.

Last August I went searching for the mountain huts my father would have used as an early ski tourer in Europe in the 1940s but found most of them turned into huge chalets.

Now my interests have moved to the south coast of New South Wales and I'll be publishing a book about my journeys there this September or October. I've enjoyed trips to central Australia and Tasmania over the years but never wanted to move from Canberra. Here, I'm surrounded by outdoor-oriented people and all the research tools I need.



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tabletopressbooks.com



Mt Kosciuszko, 1967



Switzerland, 2012



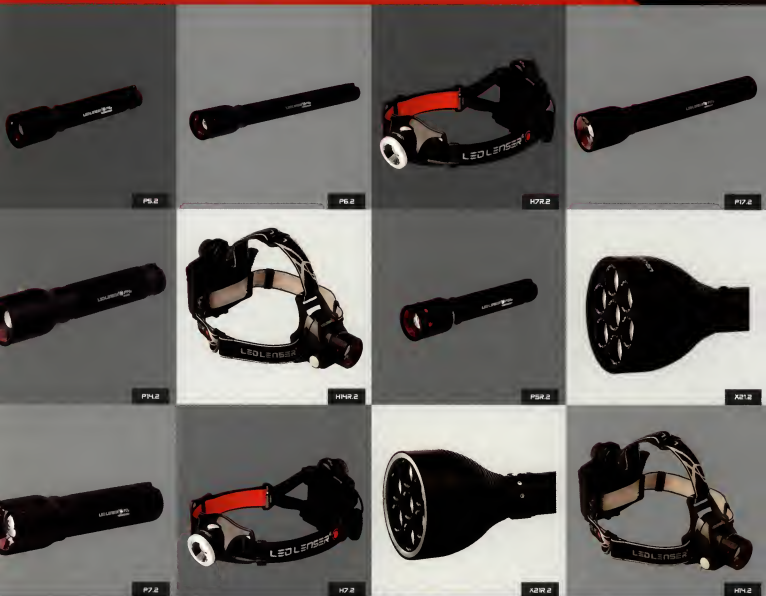
Tasmania, 2006

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